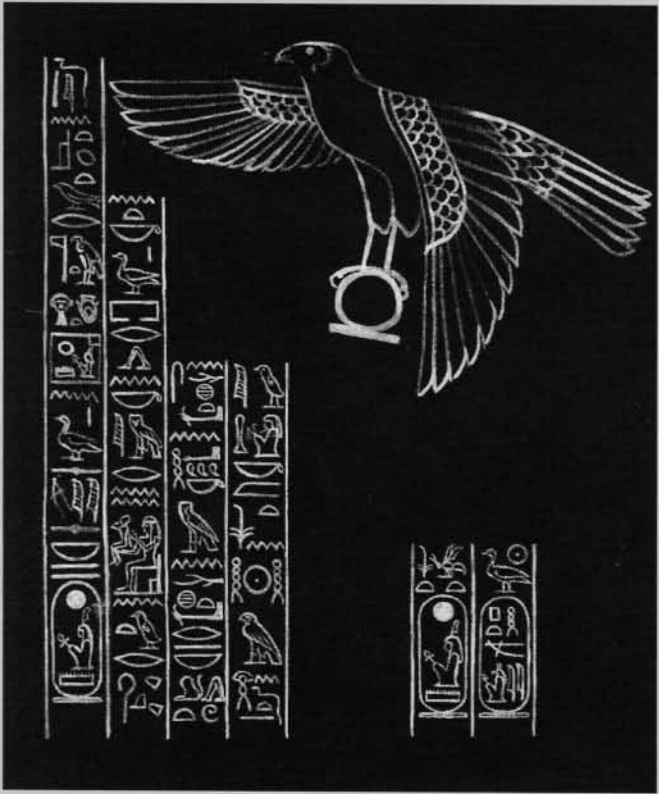
PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH



FROM ANCIENT EGYPT TO NEOPLATONISM

Algis Uždavinys

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PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH

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Preface

This book issues a serious challenge to the orthodox view of philosophy, and its accompanying narrative of development.

Ancient understanding viewed reality as a series of descending steps, starting with the most ineffable and most simple which is first unfolded through divinity and then moves down through varying conditions of existence – the highest of which are closest to the originating simplicity and are purely intelligible, but the lower being increasingly complex and changeable, ultimately becoming perceptible to the senses. These lower conditions of existence were not rejected as evil or illusive, but they were seen as deriving their worth and trustworthiness from their relation to the highest. Each plane of reality had its answering correspondence in the nature of the human being. Since the highest levels possessed the greatest intelligibility and stability, it was here that philosophers sought to centre the art and science of philosophy. For this reason philosophy was seen as an interior discipline which allowed a conscious and active participation in a divine and intellectual drama – in more modern terms it was considered to be a spiritual path, or a yoga of enlightenment.

But at some point in the passage between the ancient and modern era, this view of philosophy and its purpose was largely lost, and today we find that that what is still called philosophy has allowed its centre to slip down the levels of reality. And, of course, the human faculties upon which modern philosophy is based are necessarily at the lower levels of thought: where philosophy was meditative, contemplative and even unitive, it is now confined to a narrow form of logical reason – forever stuck in the temporal world. Reason, once valued as a launching point to the realm of eternal intellect and thence super-eternal divinity, is now an end in itself. Modern philosophy has lost its nerve: like a pilot who no longer trusts his aircraft the forward thrust of reason races us along the ground but is never transferred to an upward movement into the free air.

We now have the worst of both two possible worldviews: modern philosophy, generally speaking, no longer values metaphysics and theology (it considers both to be purely constructs of the human mind, with no basis in reality) and yet since the material world is no longer thought to be a manifestation of providential divinity, modernism cannot rid itself of a deep suspicion that body and matter are ultimately empty of goodness and meaning.

We do not need to accept the present errors: what has been diminished by centuries of neglect can be restored.

This book is not the start of a radical reappraisal of western philosophy and its origins, but it is by far the most coherent and strongest call to this task that has been written in recent times. Once we step back with its author and examine the external and internal evidence for European (in other words Greek) philosophy having grown out of that of the Egyptians, the unbiased reader must conclude that it is incredible that any other possibility should have been entertained. Why should the writers of antiquity have so consistently claimed that the best of their wise men had visited and learnt from the priests of Egypt unless there was a widespread and deeply held reverence for that land and its teachings?

To appreciate how philosophy's origins have been so thoroughly misrepresented, we need to follow Algis Uzdavinys' exposition of the way in which the true and original nature and purpose of philosophy has fallen from both the scholarly and the common view over these many centuries past. And while ultimately the failure to recognise the Egyptian roots of western philosophy may be considered as a problem largely confined to historical accuracy, the failure to understand its nature and purpose has had – and still has – the most profound, extensive and worrying consequences for the whole of humankind. This is why *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth* is such a welcome contribution to the thought life of today.

As with every radical change of position in any subject, there are likely to be details which will need to be readjusted once the dust has settled, so to speak, and other thinkers have added their own efforts to the task of exploring this new vista. Clearly the challenge this book lays down to the philosophers of today is to consider the very essence of philosophy as a participation in divine reality and, therefore, its activities as being primarily those of inner vision rather than mere logic. Once this position is seen as valid – and this may take time, as inner vision is itself a discipline which requires gradual development – we can then move back across the writings of the tradition dating from between its Egyptian and Neoplatonic phases in order to consider them in this light. At present several writers, for example, see Plato himself as part of the movement away from divine vision towards the limitations of purely logical reason. We need to ask whether this is really so, or whether modern rationalistic schools have so thoroughly misrepresented him as a sceptical logician that this has been accepted too readily by those who are moving towards this radical revision of philosophy: if this questioning is approached with an open mind, we may well find that Plato's dialogues, replete as they are with passages of mythic images, with descriptions of Socrates in meditative states, and with their constant references to traditional myth and initiation, are in reality central to philosophy as rebirth. This is an exciting exploration awaiting further research and deep thought.

Leaving this aside, we can see in *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth* that a sympathetic exploration of Ancient Egyptian high culture so clearly connects with the last flowering of Greek philosophy in the teachings of the late Platonists as well as with Eastern doctrines that we must again consider the now unfashionable concept of the existence of a perennial and universal philosophy. The truths of this philosophy, as Thomas Taylor says, "which though they have been concealed for ages in oblivion, have a subsistence coeval with the universe, and will again be restored, and flourish, for very extended periods, through all the infinite revolutions of time."

Tim Addey, October 2008

PHILOSOPHY AS A RITE OF REBIRTH

INTRODUCTION

The title of our monograph may appear rather strange and paradoxical to those who are uncritically tied to the prevailing modern systems of classification and presentation of "reality". Since philosophy now is irremediably reduced to an abstract philosophical discourse, itself frequently viewed as "an illness of language" by academic would-be-therapists, it is often very difficult to realize that an essential aspect of all ancient philosophy consists in the living *praxis* which faithfully follows the course of already established spiritual exercises and imitates archetypal patterns. The art of living demanded by the spiritual and material economy of the ancient theocratic state (itself regarded as an image of the celestial kingdom) and, eventually, by philosophy, understood as "love of wisdom", was not only a lived exercise, but, first and foremost, a lived and correctly performed sacred ritual of the great divine Mysteries, that is, the Mysteries of existence as played out by Being, Life, and Intellect themselves.

It would be unwise to pay too much attention to certain particular terms, for example, to argue that "philosophy" is exactly that term which should be applied to every manifestation of coherent human thought at all costs, or that it needs to be saved from the modern abomination by all means. However, a consistent logic allows us to use this term in different historical and cultural contexts, in spite of the conventionally accepted usage restricted, as a rule, to certain exceptional methods of investigation or to particular fields of knowledge. This scholarly freedom of interpretation is not to be viewed as a frivolous voluntarism, for the simple reason, at least, that so-called philosophical rationalism can itself be traced back to the hieratic systems of ancient semiotics which are logically coherent meta-structures of metaphysical knowledge.

In this respect, one should remember that even empirical and positivistic studies may be regarded as "fantasies elaborated in the genre of objective science and technical formula".[1] By extension, one can speak of the *genres* and *topoi* not only in literature, but also in all aspects of human social and individual life, including philosophical reasoning, creative imagination, and any kind of "experience". Even so-called scientific research and, as a consequence, contemporary technologies have their own "literary style" and contain hidden ontological premises that are utterly mythical, if not fantastic. Therefore James Hillman argues:

"Our lives are the enactment of our dreams; our case histories are from the very beginning, archetypally, dramas; we are masks (*personae*) through which the gods sound (*personare*)... All ways of speaking of archetypes are translations from one metaphor to another. Even sober operational definitions in the language of science and logic are no less metaphorical than an image which presents the archetypes as root ideas, psychic organs, figures of myth, typical styles of existence, or dominant fantasies that govern consciousness".[2]

Instead of asking "what is philosophy?"[3], one should perhaps ask what kind of contents, i.e., what kind of mental activities, spiritual dimensions, methods, attitudes, practices, or even behavioural and ritual patterns may be subscribed under the name of "philosophy" when understood in the ancient sense of the way leading to wisdom. Therefore our present intention is to show that *philosophia* in its Pythagorean, Platonic, and Neoplatonic form is structurally, thematically, and even genetically related to the ancient traditions of the Middle East, and especially those of Egypt.

The main distinction which characterizes Hellenic philosophy is not rationality as such (because the mythological world-views and related philological or hermeneutical strategies are even more rational, systematic and coherent wholes), but its, partial at least, devaluation of images and adherence to the reasoning in abstract categories and "naked facts" of logic. However, the main task of this philosophy remains essentially the same: to change perverted human nature, to transform it, eventually leading it to happiness and to a restored divine identity. This task is in fact directly inherited from the ancient "philosophies", that is, from the mysteries of death, transformation, and spiritual rebirth, and the related cosmogonical theories, systems of archetypal symbolism, and ritualized exercises of the "normative divine life".

The conventional story of "Western philosophy", established and canonized in the 18th and 19th centuries, tells us that philosophy consists in replacing myth by reason and thereby raising a rational society with rational laws. For the European Enlightenment, it means the elimination of religion and of all irrational superstitions. Here "philosophy" is identified as a secular and rationalistic enterprise, directed against the "idols" of religious imagination and faith, or, if a compromise should be involved, as a rational apology for Christian sentiments, morality, and the "natural" right of world dominion. This very compelling post-Kantian identification of philosophy with an abstract philosophical discourse still dominates both scholarly and popular consciousness and provokes different reactions, especially those raised by Traditionalists from one side and by Postmodernists from another.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, one of the leading expositors of contemporary Traditionalist thought, nonetheless defines philosophy as "a wisdom about knowledge", maintaining that "the problems of philosophy are evidently those of rationalisation", aimed at correlating the data provided by empirical experience through a reduction of particulars to universals. He says:

"Beyond this, however, philosophy has been held to mean a wisdom not so much about particular kinds of thought, as a wisdom about thinking, and an analysis of what it means to think, and an enquiry as to what may be the nature of the ultimate reference of thought. In this sense the problems of philosophy are with respect to the ultimate nature of reality, actuality or experience; meaning by reality whatever is in act and not merely potential... Knowledge is not then of individual presentations, but of types of presentation; in other words, of things in their intelligible aspect, i.e., of the being that things have in the mind of the knower, as principles, genera and species. Insofar as knowledge is directed to the attainment of ends it is called practical; in so far as it remains in the knower, theoretical or speculative".[4]

In addition to being abstract, philosophy must be systematic so as to make one logical whole.[5] Now it is fairly clear that any of the great mythological and religious systems constitutes a closed logical whole, based on strictly metaphysical premises. Therefore A. K. Coomaraswamy, partly following the Peripatetic example, actually speaks of two philosophies. The First Philosophy, which stands in accord with "revealed truth" (or simply serves as its rational vehicle), is"no longer in the first place deductive and secondarily inductive, but inductive from first to last, its logic proceeding invariably from the transcendental to the universal, and thence as before to the particular. This First Philosophy, indeed, taking for granted the principle 'as above, so below' and vice versa, is able to find in every microcosmic fact the trace or symbol of a macrocosmic actuality, and accordingly resorts to 'proof' by analogy; but this apparently deductive procedure is here employed by way of demonstration, and not by way of proof, where logical proof is out of the question, and its place is taken either by faith (Augustine's *credo ut intelligam*) or by the evidence of immediate experience (*alaukikapratyaksa*)".[6]

Accordingly, the subject of metaphysics is described as being that "of the Supreme Identity as an indissevarable unity of potentiality and act, darkness and light..."[7]

The definition of metaphysics as invariably related to the monistic concept of an absolute Supreme Identity is not self-evident without a considerable hermeneutical attempt to explain it or construct such universal meta-theory which would be able to satisfy one's "philosophical mind" in accord with particular speculative premises. Those premises include certain specific notions of immortality and eternity, death and rebirth, as well as an elaborated (often mythologized) hierarchy of being and a more or less explicit theory of divine archetypes.

All these philosophical concepts, albeit expressed in a language of myth, symbol, and ritual, are attested in the ancient Egyptian civilization and stand at the roots of Hellenic modernization of that ancient "philosophy" which is based on identifications with the divine names and qualities that imply alchemical transformations within the officially established frame of the theurgic semiotics and royal iconology. In this respect, Franz Rosenthal speaks about "a common variation of the I-am-you concept" which (as the paradigmatic mystical assertion "I am you") is widespread in the ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Indian spiritual milieu. F. Rosenthal, being a faithful modernist, attributes its origins to "the murky world of magical longings" and argues as follows:

"Magic identification was a kind of standard procedure for solving the mysteries of both the natural and supernatural worlds. It was stated that this god *is* that god, a *is* b, and immediately, power was gained and difficulties were removed. The Sanskrit Brahmanas are replete with statements of this sort: 'All the deities are Agni; all the deities are Vishnu...' The newcomer who is examined by the Brahman with the question 'Who are you?' is supposed to answer 'I am yourself'... Gnostic religions, in particular, are characterized by the fact that they reconstruct the power system that holds the world together or may tear it apart by means of an intricate series of mutual identifications of all known physical and historical data and metaphysical abstractions. The understanding of the system is the first and decisive step toward salvation".[8]

Knowledge of the divine becomes possible only through identification with it, and this identification (or gradual transformation and moving through the series of identities), culminating in union, is the ultimate goal of the Egyptian philosophical way of life. This is a path which implies purification, correct performance of hieratic rites, moral perfection, contemplation, and knowledge which proved to be the main driving force of illumination, alchemical transformation and restoration of one's true divine identity.

Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy, though operating on a different level of epistemology and dialectic, reveals the same hidden patterns. Therefore our aim is to explore these patterns and (as far as possible) indicate the ways of esoteric transmission, although the latter question is always secondary and rather marginal, mostly important for those naïve enthusiasts of historical research whose scope is limited to supposed empirical or mechanical "influences". In short, certain aspects of Hellenic (especially Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic) metaphysics consist in designation and philosophical description of the same divine principles and cosmogonical manifestations (the same in a universal sense of *philosophia perennis*, not of exact coincidence in the realm of historical facts) which are already explicitly or implicitly presented in the hieroglyphic images and symbols employed by the Egyptian priests.

The Greek philosophers themselves traced the seeds of their *haireseis* back to the Egyptian hieratic tradition. The Neoplatonists recognized the divine origin of *philosophia* and compared it to metaphysical rites, or mysteries, aimed at the ascent of the soul and its final reunion with the demiurgic Intellect (*Nous*) and the One. This mystical task (the pathway of gods, *devayana*, in Upanishadic terms) implied just such an ontological, cosmological, and imaginal context of human existence which was inseparable from the overwhelming noetic network of divine energies. The word and image, or any other theurgic symbol, were taken as essential to the process of joining the human soul to its paradigms. The universe itself was regarded as a kind of multi-dimensional text written by the divine *sophia*. Therefore "to philosophize" means to be in accord with this world-governing providence and employ certain sacramental esoteric hermeneutics for the correct reading of the ontological hieroglyphs. As Pierre Lory says:

"By naming a thing of the world, the human being awakens because the name brings forth the internal reality which corresponds to what exists in himself".[9]

Since human languages, in certain ideal respects, are taken in traditional societies to be the refraction in the human mind of the noetic cosmos and its organization, the correct creative and ritualized cultic use of sacred language itself (along with all possible riddles, puns, metaphysical etymologies, associations, and exegetical twists) may be regarded as tantamount to "philosophizing". The end of this transforming speech and this "reading" is one's transformation, awakening, and rebirth.

Accordingly, even moving across the qualitative and symbolic days of a sacred calendar is no less than following the "philosophical way" towards the desired integration by imitating the circumambulation of the Year. This both demiurgic and theurgic circle of the Year not only represents the individual's piligrimage to the archetypal principles (and his dramatic experience of the sacred), but serves as an actual model of one's philosophy in all its mystical, social, political, economical, ethical, and aesthetic aspects. If this traditional way of participation, of direct mythical experience and "surrender" (which, nonetheless, may involve the heroic aspect of initiation and trial) should be called "philosophy", then to philosophize means not to belong to the case of an extraordinary exception, but to follow one's own "predestined" path – as if moving through the archetypal Text of theophanies, masks, and changing ranks of identities to the polarities (those of Horus and Seth, of *deva* and *asura*) which transcend all duality.

When radically formulated in terms of metaphysical "identities", this final goal of philosophy – like the final goal of the ascent accomplished by the golden Horus in the *Pyramid Texts* – may be regarded as the building up of the tomb or the altar of sacrifice. Thus A. K. Coomaraswamy says:

"What metaphysics understands by immortality and by eternity implies and demands of every man a total and uncompromising denial of himself and a final mortification, to be dead and buried in the Godhead… For the Supreme Identity is no less a Death and a Darkness than a Life and a Light, no less Asura than Deva… And this is what we understand to be the final purport of the First Philosophy."[10]

To call this hieratic enterprise – initially related to the particular trends of ancient thought – by the term of the "First Philosophy" is a matter of mere convention inherited from the tradition of Western scholasticism. However, the same idea of spiritual rebirth and final union dominated both Egyptian cultic practices and sophisticated Neoplatonic thought.

It is no wonder that Modernism (partly based on the Protestant legacy) rejects altogether this kind of sacramental philosophy and, instead, presents as philosophy its own way of explaining things and of imposing reductionist ideological fantasies. It is even more interesting, however, that so-called Postmodernism enjoys breaking with the entire philosophical tradition (classified, idolized, and cherished by Modernism) which, presumably, runs from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Hegel.

Certain critics of modern social institutions describe this breaking as a rebellion against the totalitarian tendency in Western philosophy, thereby affirming as salutary the mind's powerlessness to "think" the so-called Other and, consequently, instead of negative theology promoting all kinds of sheer irrationalism and stupidity. Michel Foucault argues:

"The death of God sent all the stable forms of previous thought up in flames and used their charred remains to draw strange and perhaps impossible faces."[11]

Richard Rorty, another influential writer, speaks of the utter bankruptcy of traditional philosophizing and of what he calls "epistemologically centred philosophy".[12] His ruthless criticism is mainly directed against the whole epistemological project of modernity, initiated by the followers of Descartes and Kant. However, at the same time and by the same stroke, the Postmodern relativists ridicule all traditional metaphysical systems (especially those belonging to the Neoplatonic stream), viewing their claims for divine truth and beauty as being utterly groundless ideological fictions. Philosophy itself is said to be coming to its unglorious end, since the "post-philosophical" attitude finds its solipsistic pleasure in rejecting any form of universal theory.

The world is turned upside down. Therefore it would be rather incorrect to think that one of the main characteristics of Postmodern thought consists of its insistence on the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. The *praxis* of self-indulgence, forgetfulness, deviation, and sin (if not an actual crime in the name of pseudo-humanism and democracy) is surely not the same as the spiritual *praxis* of purification, *askesis*, contemplation, self-sacrifice, remembrance, and virtue. The Postmodern fighters against the metaphysical order of things and against any *shari'ah* (that is, the sacred law) think that the dragon represents the values of the modern administrated and disciplinary world; therefore "these values must be destroyed if the spirit is to become the value-creating, life-affirming child".[13]

When spiritual sanity itself is turned into a fantasy, one thing is forgotten and neglected, namely, that, as Frithjof Schuon pointed out:

"Intelligence has, on the one hand, no effective worth unless its contents are the fundamental and saving truths; on the other, intelligence must be in balance with virtue and faith".[14]

Accordingly, the philosophical relativism of the "life-affirming child" (to whom wisdom is tantamount to a seductive and wild public woman) is capable only of laughter and irony with their compelling logic of theatre. And the crazy Postmodern theatre is not that which presents the mysterious story of al-Khidr and Moses (even if seen through the eyes of Mulla Nasreddin), but that which shows the ugly traits of a trivial sadomasochist play. This is because "an intelligence devoid of truth remains beneath itself", according to the apt remark made by F. Schuon.[15] As Gary B. Madison says:

> "We are inevitably condemned to relativism when, rejecting like Rorty the metaphysical notion of Truth, we reject also all metanarratives, when, that is, we reject the legitimacy of theory, which always seeks some form of *universal* validity. And, similarly, we find ourselves in a state of nihilism when, rejecting the metaphysical notion of Reality, we go on to assert as well that everyone's 'truths' are merely their own private 'fictions', when, that is, we equate fiction with mere semblance (simulacrum) and deny it the power to recreate or refigure, and thus enhance, what is called 'reality'."[16]

Our present task is not to argue against the mental acrobatics of those who follow R. Rorty or to claim that we are in possession of certain exclusive "formal" truth, whatever this word may mean for different audiences. On the contrary, our purpose is quite humble: to discuss certain parallels between ancient Egyptian and Hellenic thought, and to show that *philosophia* (apart of other important aspects) is directly or indirectly based on the hieratic patterns of ancient cults and may itself be regarded as a rite of transformation and noetic rebirth. This hermeneutical rite of "philosophizing" (which partly consists in moving through the ontological text, that is, through the cosmic maze of ideas, thoughts, words, images, symbols, and deeds) is not simply a playful metaphorical enterprise that belongs to the realm of rhetoric, but involves the restoration of one's right mind and promises the final reunion with divine principles. The metaphysical discourse thereby produced is based on noetic intuitions, ambivalent terms, and paradoxical images, thus constituting the closed "hermeneutical circle" of its own. It cannot be simply rendered into the positivistic language of "facts" or turned into the "merely dead fiction" of the contemporary historical museum, without losing its hidden theurgic dimension, imaginative appeal and transformative *barakah*.

Although every hermeneutical perspective constructs and reconstructs more or less coherent and meaningful pictures of the past, always based on the particular spiritual needs and expectations of their real or imagined audiences, it would be unwise and incorrect to disregard most of them or to neglect them altogether simply because one's mental horizon is ruled by learned "scientific" tales of a different kind. Always keeping in mind the larger metaphysical picture and accepting that different variations of hierarchy, far from being simply Platonic or Neoplatonic "inventions", are valid for their wider ontological contexts, one can equate *par analogiam*, for example, the solar Atum-Ra to the Neoplatonic *Nous*, or one can use the terms *sekhem*, *shakti*, and *dunamis* as being, in certain cases, interchangeable. However, such rather loose comparisons are not meant to claim the strict coincidence of their objects (figures of thought, literary forms, underlying symbols, myths, and philosophical categories) in every respect or to "prove" that, historically speaking, any particular concept of a certain tradition straightforwardly "derives" from another one which is similar but belongs to a foreign culture.

To quote J. Hillman again (despite his persistent wish to reduce and transfer noetic realities to the level of psychic imagination):

"The mind from the beginning must be based in the blue firmament, like the lazuli stone and sapphire throne of mysticism, the azure heaven of Boehme, *philos sophia.* …it is a mythical place that gives metaphorical support to metaphysical thinking. It is the presentation of metaphysics in image and form."[17]

The present monograph consists of seven parts which are unequal in length and subdivided into chapters. Parts IV and VI were initially written as separate essays, then revised and integrated into the book. This project would never have been accomplished without the kind support of the Matheson Trust. For their considerable assistance I am grateful to Reza Shah-Kazemi, Khalid Naqib, and my wife Virginia.

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1 *The Essential James Hillman. A Blue Fire,* ed. by Thomas Moore, London: Routledge, 1994, p.3

2 Ibid., p.82; p.83

3 See: Pierre Hadot *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?,* Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1995

4 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy *On the Pertinence of Philosophy.-* What is Civilization? And Other Essays, Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1989, p.14; p.13

5 Ibid., p.15

6 Ibid., p.17

7 Ibid., p.18

8 Franz Rosenthal *"I am you" – Individual Piety and Society in Islam.-* Muslim Intellectual and Social History. A Collection of Essays, London: Variorum, 1990, ch. IX, p.34; p.36

9 Pierre Lory *Know the World to Know Yourself.-* The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn et al., Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2001, p.721

10 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, ibid., p.28

11 Michel Foucault *The Order of Things,* New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1973, p.263

12 Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p.357

13 Deborah Cook *Amor Fati and Spirit of the Lion.-* Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy, ed. by M. Zlomislic et al., St. Catharines, Ontario: Joyful Wisdom Publishing, 1991, p.101

14 Frithjof Schuon *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy,* tr. by J. Peter Hobson, London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, 1976, p.72

15 Ibid., p.86

16 Gary B. Madison *Coping with Nietzsche's Legacy: Rorty, Derrida, Gadamer.-* Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy, ed. by M. Zlomislic et al., St. Catharines, Ontario: Joyful Wisdom Publishing, 1991, pp.74-75

17 *The Essential James Hillman. A Blue Fire,* pp.34-35

1. Philosophy and Eternal Wonder

One must be careful in thinking that *philosophia* first appeared with Pythagoras (who visited all the Egyptian priests, acquiring all the wisdom each possessed, according to Iamblichus in *De vita Pythagorica* 4)[1], simply because he invented this term, according to the ancient Hellenic tradition. For Pythagoras, philosophy, associated with the way of Apollo, consists in a purification, in becoming aware of the divine principles and in assimilation to God. This Pythagorean way of life (*bios Puthagorikos: Rep.*600ab) cannot be opposed to sacred rites, because the true and immortal divine nature is achieved not only by means of *theoria*, or contemplation of the universal principles of harmony, but through *praxis* which is both *askesis* and *therapeia.* Pythagoras himself conducted the hieratic rituals behind a veil, but only those who had passed all five-year tests, initiations and necessary purifications were privileged to see the face of the Philosopher, their divine *hegemon* (spiritual guide and leader). Thus, with certain subtle reservations, we should accept the claim made by David R. Fideler:

"Yet while Pythagoreanism remains closely related to the Orphic thought of the period, the clearly distinguishing factor between the two is that for the Pythagoreans liberation from the wheel is obtained not through religious rite, but through philosophy, the contemplation of first principles. Hence, *philosophia* is a form of purification, a way to immortality. As others have observed, whereas the Eleusinian mysteries offered a single revelation, and Orphism a religious way of life, Pythagoras offered a way of life based on philosophy".[2]

However, *philosophia*, or rather philosophizing – understood in the ancient sense as a special way of life and *paideia*, as seeking of truth – is modelled on the inner theurgic patterns and cosmic rhythms. It is a grave mistake to regard "ritual" (*telete,* or *ritus*, the last word being closely connected with the Vedic concept of *rta*, the universal order maintained by the constant *theia erga*, divine works) merely as an external ceremony which injures the Protestant and Modern iconoclastic sensibilities.

Perhaps the "wonder" which, according to the ancients, provokes the "birth of philosophy" has nothing arbitrary and "spontaneous" as understood in the Modern liberal sense, because this secondary wonder repeats the primeval cosmogonical wonder. In Pharaonic Egypt, the wonder hymned by the Eastern *Bau* (the spiritual manifestations of Thoth) at the rise, or rebirth, of the Sun reflects the eternal wonder which constitutes the blissful divine Self-consciousness at the appearance of the noetic Sun, of Atum-Ra, who stems from the abyss of ineffable waters. And this wonder at sunrise is not complete without the wonder at sunset when the mystery of death is revealed and Anubis leads to the tomb and the inner Osirian temple of alchemical transformation.

If human wonder (*thaumazein*), when facing life and death, divine glories and terrestrial miseries, is the true origin of philosophizing, then we should agree with Ch. Evangeliou that philosophical speculation can go as far back as the appearance of *Anthropos*.[3] But the related passage from the *Theaetetus* of Plato proves that this wonder is discussed along with the concept of initiation:

"This sense of wonder is the mark of the Philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris daughter of Thaumas… Then just take a look around and make sure that none of the uninitiated overhears us. I mean by uninitiated the people who believe that nothing is real save what they can grasp with their hands and do not admit that actions and processes or anything invisible can count as real" (*Theaet.*155dc).

Plato clearly states that philosophical wonder is wonder raised by things real and invisible, i.e., the Forms, or noetic realities, and this "miraculous" philosophical knowledge regarding the ascent to the Intelligible realm is not arrived at or learned at random, but constitutes the essence of initiation.

In addition to initiation and guides, philosophy requires leisure, understood as a necessary condition for the contemplative life, as long as this "leisure" does not consist of the regular toil of the "liturgic life", conducted in the Egyptian temples nor, by extension, the daily life dictated by pious ascetic attitudes. According to the testimony provided by Aristotle:

"That philosophy is not a science of production is clear even from the history of the earliest philosophers. For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize… And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders" (*Metaph.*982b11-19).

"Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which aim neither to give pleasure nor to procure the necessities of life were discovered, and discovered first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure" (ibid., 981b 19-24).

Those contemporary scholars who have a strong ideological bias (especially when the academic scepticism itself becomes a sort of sinister ideology), a bias based on the Modern and Postmodern "scientific" mythology, are condemned to blindness and may quickly dismiss the following claim of Isocrates about Pythagoras:

"On a visit to Egypt he became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy, and more conspicuously than others he seriously interested himself in sacrifices and in ceremonial purity…" (*Bousiris* 28).

According to Isocrates, the ancient Egyptians, who are strong in their piety and in practical wisdom (*eusebeia kai phronesis*), introduced the practice of philosophy (*philosophias askesin*) for the soul, "a pursuit which has the power, not only to establish laws but also to investigate the nature of the universe" (ibid.21ff). This perspective shows Pythagoras as merely the inspired and gifted imitator who played a role of philosophical avatar for the young Hellenic civilization and built up his philosophy on the already firmly established tradition.

To assert that philosophy (and it has many different forms beyond that of discursive Western rationalism) begins with wonder means to trace it back to the *tep sepi* (the Egyptian "first time"), to the noetic revelations and the archetypal Ancestor of humanity itself. In fact, philosophy deals with just a few essential questions: (1) Who we are, and (2) What we ought to do, in order to improve our being and escape the threat of perdition. Knowledge of our identities and relations to the archetypal realm is not necessarily produced by fluctuating human opinions and fancies: more frequently it is regarded as God-sent from the beyond, revealed from above or from within. It is therefore no wonder that for Arabs and Muslims in general Adam is the first among prophets.

This theme is elaborated and developed by the eminent Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi (sometimes called Ibn Aflatun, Son of Plato) who regards Adam as the very first principle of reflection and the spirit of the reflected form. For the *shaykh al-akbar*, Adam is equivalent to the archetype of humankind, the principle of the creative process, close to the Plotinian Intellect (*Nous*) or, perhaps, its image at the level of the universal Soul. Adam integrates in himself all cosmic realities and their individual manifestations, and all the Names of God; therefore he is an agent of eidetic knowledge. Ibn al-'Arabi says:

"Were it not that the Reality permeates all beings as form [in His qualitative form], and were it not for the intelligible realities, no [essential] determination would be manifest in individual beings. Thus, the dependence of the Cosmos on the Reality for its existence is an essential factor… You are now acquainted with the Wisdom involved in the corporeal formation of Adam, his outer form, as you have become acquainted with the spiritual formation of Adam, his inner form, namely, that he is the Reality [as regards the latter] and that he is creature [as regards the former]. You have also learned to know his rank as the all-synthesizing [form] by which he merits the [divine] Regency".[4]

According to Neoplatonic philosophy, the divine Intellect thinks of the totality of the universe of Forms to which it itself has given rise. He is the eternal creator and sustainer of all subsequent ontological manifestation, therefore at any specific time and any place one by necessity can glimpse the same truths and construct similar metaphysical doctrines, though expressed in different terms, styles, and images. Such perspective provides a firm foundation for the "perennial philosophy" in its countless outflows. The boundless noetic world (*kosmos noetos*) consists in complete non-spatiality and contains in itself the principles of any possible wisdom, regardless of their sometimes distorted earthly reflections and historical trajectories.

The only problem is that most of the so-called Modern thinkers cannot accept the "hypothesis" of the Forms or the divine Intellect. According to their presumption, any philosophy that approaches or claims to approach the divine presence, unity, or wisdom, ends in the struggle of absolute truths and confronts only its own deadly violence. Positivistic optimism gives promise for salvation through ever increasing information, sometimes worthless and even harmful for spiritual integrity. In a certain sense J. Derrida may be correct in describing violence as the ideological dominance exercised by metaphysics (in the Modern distorted sense of this term), but his own linguistic grammatology exercises a similar, if not greater violence.[5] With permanent cynicism and laughter one cannot cope with contradictions which are present at the level of discursive thought, and so eventually one may depart from "philosophy" altogether. However, our present task is to analyse ancient ways of thought which are inseparable from noetic certainty, revelation and ascent to the divine.

2. Learning to Live and Learning to Die

The traditional Egyptian *paideia* (education) consisted in energizing superior and integral wisdom for the good of the entire body-like state (permeated and sustained by the royal *ka*, the vital principle) and for the soul (*ba*), both governed by the sacred principle of *maat* (truth, right measure, justice). This *paideia* had been under the rulership of the priests, or philosophers, as Isocrates maintained, because the priests had a leisure (*schole*), which allowed learning (*schole*), aimed at producing the contemplative man (*aner theoretikos*). If we accept the fact that the ancient Hellenes (not only the Pythagoreans) revered the Egyptian form of government and imitated their teachings regarding the soul and their spiritual exercises, there is no reason to doubt that *philosophia* (at least in a certain special sense) is indeed a product of Egypt. The term itself (Isocrates is among the first of those who started to use it) may simply be a rendering of an analogous Egyptian term, now unknown, but probably related to some compound of *meri* (love) and *rekh* (knowledge).

It is not necessary to be a cultural hero to understand that the term "philosophy" may cover and include different ways of thought which cannot be reduced to the "monomythic" Hellenic rationalism, praised by those who thereby try to conceal their own intellectual crimes and excuse some Modern superstitions. As John P. Anton observes, while discussing the philosophical trust in *eros* and in the power of *logos* (which cannot endure without the divine language of Being and sacred Mythology):

"I feel certain that the right to philosophize, to gain access to this intellectual virtue is not something one secures by paying annual dues to the American Philosophical Association".[6]

It is difficult to decide whether the Greek term *nous* (intellect, intuition, perceiving, essential and non-discursive understanding) may really be derived from the Egyptian verb *nu, nua* (see, look), related to the Greek *noeo* (see, perceive, observe), or the Greek *sophia* (wisdom) – from the Egyptian *seba* (teaching, learning, star), as Martin Bernal boldly asserts.[7] However, such philological uncertainty cannot prevent us from recognizing the Egyptian "philosophy", or love of wisdom and learning. The term *sebayt*, teaching, employed by the Egyptians themselves, was used to designate various texts of instructions, complaints and praises, including those belonging to the wisdom-literature. Such ancient sages (sometimes turned into the archetypal authorities) as Hardjedet, Imhotep, Neferty, Khety, Ptahemdjehuty, Khakheperresonbe, Ptahhotpe and Kaires, mentioned by the Papyrus Chester Beatty IV of Ramesside date, may be regarded as spiritual guides and philosophers. Also we suspect that some kind of "philosophy" may be deduced from the symbolism of sacred art and the temple rites, because the later Platonic philosophy is consciously or unconsciously modelled according to the hidden ritualistic patterns.

The wisdom-literature as such constitutes only a small and perhaps "modernized" part of the abundant writings produced in ancient Egypt. It assigned the central position to Neter ("God" as an anonymous term), regarded as Creator and Sustainer of all things, the sovereign Lord, supreme Judge and ever-present Helper, the invisible and omnipotent Shepherd of mankind. Man's responsibilities towards Him consist of worship, obedience and trust, especially emphasized in the Ramesside age, when personal piety becomes an exemplary virtue. The ideal of the truly silent man (*ger maa*), first found in early wisdom-literature and developed by the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.) theologies, is really the Pythagorean ideal. This concept of silence is not only the prerogative of initiates who face the ineffable Principle, but includes the proper attitude before a deity in the temple and in the worshipper's heart, good manners in the presence of teacher, higher official and friend, self-control (*ger*) and subduing of passions, exercised by the "rational soul", to put it into the later Hellenic terms. Sometimes this ruling principle is understood and represented as the overwhelming *ka* of the Pharaoh, who himself is the Son of Ra.

The ancient Egyptian texts not only deal with the fate of the soul (*ba*) in the Netherworld, but provide the motivation for the good life here and now by doing the will of God (*sekheru en neter*). The admonitions inscribed in the tomb of Petosiris, the renowned sage and priest of Thoth (around 4th century B.C.), appeal to the living:

"O you who come afterwards, O every man who reads writing, come and read these inscriptions which are in this tomb that I may guide you to the path of life and tell you your conduct, [in order that you may moor at the harbour of the ci]ty of generations. Should you hold firm to my sayings, you will discover their value and will thank me for them."[8]

This one and other similar texts (*sebayt*) advise the reader to follow truth and wisdom in every pursuit, i.e., to live and depart to the beautiful West (to die) according to the established patterns of a pious and righteous servant of God.

A student of ancient civilizations must remember constantly that even in Graeco-Roman antiquity philosophy was regarded as spiritual guidance toward a happy life as well as initiation, successful transformation and integration into the "divine chorus" after death.

I. Hadot describes it briefly as characterized by two paradigmatic formulas: learning to live and learning to die, where the latter formula can be regarded as the logical presupposition of the former.[9]

Seen in this light, *philosophia* is a method aimed at the elimination of irrational fears, ambitions, and passions, at transformation and recovering of our essential identity. It requires the aspirant to act in a pious and holy fashion (*eusebos kai hosios*), realizing that all initiations and visions are conferred on intellect by the hidden powers within the immense temple of the gods, which is the universe itself. "Everything is full of gods", according to Thales of Miletus (fr.22DK); therefore in order to philosophize it is necessary to be pious.

Since a parallel is established between (1) a temple of initiation like that of Eleusis and (2) the cosmos, the most holy of temples, human beings observe many wonders and initiatory spectacles (*mustika theamata*) in both of them. For this reason, the ancient Egyptians present the image of the stability of principles in "the holiest of temples which is the world" (Proclus *In Tim.* I.124.16-19). The time between birth and death is an uninterrupted feast and liturgy which must be properly performed:

"For the world is a very holy temple and most worthy of God; man is introduced into it by birth and there he does not contemplate statues (*agalmaton*) made by the hand of man and deprived of movement, but the sensible realities which the divine Intellect has brought into being in imitation of the intelligible realities, as Plato says… Our life which is an absolutely perfect admission and initiation into these mysteries (*muesin onta kai teleten teleiotaten*) must be full of confidence and joy… But these feasts which God offers to us and in which he is the mystagogue are profaned if we spend the best part of our lives in lamentation, recriminations and exhausting anxieties" (Plutarch *De tranquillitate animi* 20.477cd).

In antiquity, the theoretical side of philosophy, if this specific side existed at all apart from the general theological and mythical outlook, was subordinated to the practical side. This practical side (which included contemplation) was regarded as "philosophizing" proper, and applied to all aspects of life - political, ethical, liturgical and mystical. Being considered as spiritual guidance and education toward all goodness, beauty, and wisdom, ancient philosophy was only secondarily seen as a theoretical explanation of the world. And this explanation itself, along with the knowledge of epistemology and logic, served as an icon in order to provide the necessary intellectual conditions for a happy life, and for spiritual transformation and ascent (*anagoge*), or return (*epistrophe*), to the first Principle, the source of all being, life, and intelligence. However, the philosophical schools which emerged in the 4th to 3rd centuries B.C. and introduced a new type of spiritual guidance ("an organized work of love", aimed at rationalization of thought and conduct) considered that moral and ontological self-knowledge must precede all spiritual progress in the philosophical discovery of the hidden truth (*aletheia*).

But every philosophical tradition expected to teach its adherents how to die. This aim was achieved through the critical analysis of phenomena, self-examination, and *askesis*, largely derived from Egyptian and Pythagorean sources. The different kinds of commentary, allegorical explanation and symbolic interpretation were used – some found in the privileged texts written by the founders of *haireseis*, others in divine oracles and sacred rites. Such hermeneutical practices were thought to lead to inner transformation and spiritual rebirth. Nevertheless, the written texts and logical systems of thought, constructed using powers of discursive reasoning, were regarded only as a temporary measure in place of personal instructions of the spiritual guide (*kathegemon, hegemon*). He shows the way and therefore must be trusted and treated as a godlike father. Thus, according to this line of traditional thinking, the Stoic Epictetus presents an acute and revealing question:

"Do I go to my teacher prepared to obey him like an oracle? Or am I not also one of those, who in their folly only go to school in order to learn the history of philosophy, to understand books which they did not understand before and to explain them to others should the occasion arise?" (*Discourses* 2.21.10).

3. Ancient Practices of Wisdom

Contrary to current opinion, expressed as rationalistic dogma which holds ancient philosophy (or philosophy as such) to be an exclusively intellectual, theoretical, system-building or system-demolishing activity, recent investigations are able to show that it consists primarily in contemplation of cosmic beauties and noetic archetypes of being as well as in fulfillment of the *telos* which is present in the human soul. As Ch. Evangeliou emphasizes, for Plato and Aristotle, the genuine Hellenic philosopher is most beloved of the Hellenic gods (*theophilestatos*). This author cites the assertion made by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan that "the Upanishads speak to us of the way in which the individual self gets at the ultimate reality by an inward journey, an inner ascent" and adds: the same goal pervades the Hellenic philosophical tradition from Pythagoras to Proclus, if correctly understood.[10]

A. H. Armstrong also insists that, for ancient philosophers, philosophy as preparation for death was an extremely demanding way of life requiring the intense study of the whole of reality, not simply "scientific" understanding of things.[11] Philosophy is concerned not only with human well-being, but with the search for soul-transforming wisdom. For Plotinus, this means to recover the soul's "ancient state" (*archaian katastasin: Enn.* IV.7.9.31; cf . Plato *Rep.*547b 6-7). It is the same as to be illuminated by the truth from the Good, which radiates truth over all the intelligibles. The soul, purified and cleansed by philosophy, resembles the "living gold" (*chrusos empsuchos*: ibid., IV.7.10.48):

"This soul does make it clear that its evils are external accretions to the soul and come from elsewhere, but that when it is purified the best things are present in it, wisdom and all the rest of virtue, and are its own. If, then, the soul is something of this kind when it goes up again to itself, it must surely belong to that nature which we assert is that of all the divine and eternal. For wisdom and true virtue are divine things (*phronesis gar kai arete alethes theia onta*), and could not occur in some trivial mortal being, but something of such a kind [as to possess them] must be divine (*theion)*, since it has a share in divine things through its kinship and consubstantiality (*dia sungeneian kai to homousion: Enn.* IV.7.10.11-20).

Having ascended to the divine the philosopher-sage can pronounce, following Empedocles: "Greetings, I am for you an immortal god" (*chairet, ego d' humin theos ambrotos*). The great Sufi masters, such as Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.874) and al-Hallaj ibn Mansur (d.922) clearly follow the same stream of "spiritual drunkenness" (*sukr*) and ecstatic outbursts (*shatahat*).

According to Pierre Hadot, who thoroughly investigated the very nature of ancient *philosophia*, its literary genres, rhetorical rules, exegetical strategies, and spiritual exercises, an implicit distinction between philosophy and philosophical discourse is already evident in Plato's definition of philosophy as a training for death (*Phaed.*67cd). It means that philosophy consists in liberating the soul from passions. This liberation is achieved through the practice of the virtues and knowledge, that is through a lived concrete exercise, stripping away everything that is not truly itself. The ancient philosophy, which cures the soul's illness by teaching a radically new way of life, removes forgetfulness and is not simply "a discourse about objects, be they even the highest, but it wishes actually to lead the soul to a living, concrete union with the Intellect and the Good".[12] Therefore *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom, is an art of loving, seeing, understanding, and living, not simply of constructing a technical jargon reserved for specialists. It is a method of purification and spiritual ascent which demands a radical transformation of one's thought and existence in order to reach the *telos* described as "wisdom". And the real wisdom does not merely cause us to know discursively: it makes us "be" in a different way[13] by uniting knowledge (*gnosis*) and being (*ousia*).

Although this wisdom is regarded as the knowledge of causes and principles, i.e., as *prote philosophia*, "first philosophy", by Aristotle (*Metaph.*981b 25-982 ab), some of the ancient philosophers viewed it as ineffable and unspeakable. Thus, in order to be a lover of wisdom, to live a philosophical life, to "philosophize", it is not necessary to develop a philosophical discourse in the sense of an elaborate scientific system and to carry out academic research. Rather, every person who lives according to the rules of intellect (*nous*) or to the precepts left by the founder of any particular school (*hairesis*) is considered a philosopher.

But what about those who consciously lived according to the revealed divine patterns, mythical paradigms and sacramental rituals? May they be regarded as philosophers and why? Of course, if the definitions of *philosophia* and philosophizing are restricted to certain historical forms of rationalism and logic, the attitude of *philosophia perennis* may rightly be labelled as uncritical and even silly. Why must one be captured by the term *philosophia* and try to expand its meaning in order to cover so many different forms of religious thought, devotional and cultic practice?

However, our position, which recognizes the universality (but not uniformity) of human love and longing for wisdom, itself constitutes one of many possible philosophical perspectives, which are not limited to spurious postmodern fiction. Therefore the widened application of the term "philosophy" is approved, despite the negative attitude and scorn of those modern thinkers who themselves usurped the right meaning of this term, claiming it exclusively for their narrow one-sided use. And in many cases the opinions of the ancients (especially of those who followed the Pythagorean tradition) provide considerable support for our perspective. So now let us turn to the numerous historical testimonies.

The spiritual and intellectual traditionalism of the late Roman world made no distinction between the truth revealed by oracles and those stated by divinely possessed or inspired philosophers. The only reservation regarding an unequal validity of different "philosophies" is made by the emperor Julian in the following assertion:

"Only philosophy is suitable for us (priests), and of philosophers only those who acknowledge the gods as the guides of their *paideia*, for example, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and those who follow Chrysippus and Zeno. For we should not occupy ourselves with all philosophers, or with all doctrines, but only with those philosophies that imbue us with piety and teach us about the gods…" (*Ep.*89b).[14]

According to Julian and other Neoplatonists, famous for their cultic preoccupations, Plato is the authoritative expositor of the divine mysteries, but even his doctrines must be read, interpreted and followed only in the proper esoteric manner. They need to be harmonized with the oracles and revelations granted by the gods to different nations. In his letter to the philosopher Theodorus, the high-priest "of all temples in Asia", Julian says:

"For I certainly am not one of those who believe that the soul perishes before the body or along with it, nor do I believe any human being but only the gods (*tois theois de monon*); since it is likely that they alone have the most perfect knowledge of these matters, if indeed we ought to use the word 'likely' of what is inevitably true; since it is fitting for men to conjecture about such matters, but the gods must have complete knowledge" (*Ep.*20).

Real knowledge about divine matters cannot stem from discursive human reasonings. It may only be sent "from above", from the realm of Ideas, or revealed by the divine Intellect to the human intellect, as long as it is purified (this is the aim of philosophical exercises) and able to receive a glimpse of the supreme Light. Therefore for the true philosopher, as Damascius maintains, it is not enough to be skilled in the externals of philosophy, concerned with a multitude of theories and brilliant syllogisms. If a person is "inwardly barren of soul and lacking in true knowledge (*Isid.*33), he cannot be reckoned among those who belong to the holy race (*hiera genea*) and cannot be regarded as a true philosopher. Hence, not only Sceptics or Epicureans, but even those Platonists who are characterized merely by external learning (which may be very impressive indeed) are excluded from the circle of true philosophers. They are not "divine men" (*theioi andres*), since true divine philosophers are the winged souls who have accomplished (or at least started) their ascent and dwell in "the plain of truth".

The philosophers belonging to the holy race are described as possessing intrinsic sanctity: they live apart, "leading the blissful life which is pleasing to the gods, devoted to philosophy and worship of divine beings" (*Isid.*95). Against this lofty ideal merely accurate discursive learning and human culture are not regarded as sufficient: divine possession (*enthousiasmos*), separation of the soul from the body (*ekstasis*) and the ascent (*anagoge*) into the realm of the divine are required:

"Those who apply themselves to things perishable and human, or who seek too hastily to gain understanding, or who are too eager for knowledge (*philomatheis*), obtain little of the wisdom that is great and divine. Among the ancients, Aristotle and Chrysippus were immensely gifted, but they were extremely avid for knowledge and hard-working, so they did not complete the whole ascent" (*Isid.*36)

The "knowledge" mentioned in this excerpt by Damascius is not something such as the Hermetic *gnosis* or Plato's *episteme*, but rather a passion for learning without practising the spiritual elevation, equally characteristic of contemporary Western philosophers and scientists. The Neoplatonists made a distinction between (1) conventional philosophy concerned with abstract philosophical contemplation and ordinary *paideia* and (2) priestly, or divine, philosophy, practised "by certain true priests (*hupo de tinon hiereon alethinon*) who had adopted the manner of life appropriate to initiation into the mysteries" (Proclus *Plat. Theol.* I.1), and this philosophy leads to union with the gods. The priestly philosophy is partly inherited from the ancient Oriental civilizations and related to pious sacramental actions, theurgic initiations and divine names.

Therefore the emperor Julian praises the ancients as "not possessed of a wisdom acquired and fabricated like ours, but philosophizing in a natural manner" (*all' autophuos philosophountes*: *Or.* III.82b). In this case, the "natural" means closer to the divine origin, to the Golden Age, "naturally" revealed, not acquired through discursive training and system-building. It is almost certain that these "ancients" are not the "first Greek philosophers", known to us from the current Western histories of philosophy, but more probably the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Phoenician, or Indian sages.

4. True Ancient Philosophy and the Way of Pious Living

The Platonic philosopher Celsus around AD 180 wrote a book against Christians entitled *Alethes Logos* which did not survive. However, Origen's *Contra Celsum* preserved certain fragments, one of which runs as follows:

"There is an ancient doctrine which has existed from the beginning, which has always been maintained by the wisest nations and cities and wise men" (*Contra Celsum* I.14).

The wisest nations are those famous for their philosophy or mysteries, i.e., Egyptians, Assyrians, Indians, Persians, Odrysians, Samothracians, and Eleusinians. J. C. M. Van Winden argues that *alethes logos* really means "true wisdom", instead of "true doctrine" as it is held by H. Chadwick and other scholars.[15] But this academic controversy is not very important for our subject. Celsus simply states the common belief of his time that religious and philosophical truth shines more brightly at the beginning. In other words, he speaks about the primordial tradition, be it a tradition of "wisdom" or "philosophy". He even makes no distinction between the philosophy proper and the mystery cults, because he speaks in the same breath of Eleusinians (who are not a "nation" in any normal sense) and the Assyrians (who built a huge empire and whose name in Roman times was used rather loosely).

Clement of Alexandria also affirmed the existence of an ancient philosophy which may be found all over the civilized world, because every nation had its own philosophers and sages. Therefore he argues:

"I think that it was in the realization of the great benefit accruing from the sages that all the Brahmans, the Odrysae, the Getae, and the people of Egypt honoured these men and made philosophy a public institution and examined their words as sacred texts, together with the Chaldeans and the inhabitants of Arabia Felix (as it is called), and of Palestine, and a considerable section of the Persian people, and countless other peoples in addition" (*Stromateis* I.68.1).

For the modern scholar it is quite uncomfortable to find some "ancient philosophy" even in the south of Arabia; therefore he is happy to dismiss this and other similar accounts as crazy tales. But it is well attested that early Christianity, for instance, regarded itself as a prolongation and fulfillment of an ancient philosophy. Therefore let us see how the true philosophy is described by the early Christians themselves. According to Justin the Martyr who wrote the *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* at about AD 160:

"Philosophy is really the greatest and most honourable thing man can possess. It alone brings us to God and unites us with Him and truly holy are those who apply themselves to philosophy. What philosophy really is and why it was sent down to men has escaped the masses. Otherwise there would be no Platonists, Stoics, etc." (*Dialogue* 2.1).

It follows that philosophy is sent down to men and ultimately based on a divine authority, because true philosophy "alone brings us to God and unites us with Him". Being the knowledge of being (*episteme tou ontos*), philosophy is knowledge of God, of what is true and truly exists. To see God is the aim of Plato's philosophy (ibid.,2.6). So, Platonism is viewed as being close to revelation: surely "sent down" to Plato. In Justin's *Dialogue* Trypho the Jew raises the following question:

"Do not all philosophers in all their discussions discuss God? Do they not investigate His sovereignty and providence on every occasion? And is inquiring about the divine not the task of philosophy?" (ibid.).

For Clement of Alexandria, philosophy is a form of the practice of wisdom, and wisdom is the scientific understanding of things divine, human, and their causes (*Stromateis* I.30.1). Since the Lord himself says, "I am the truth" (John 14.6), philosophy, being a direct gift of God, includes questions concerning truth and the nature of the universe. Those philosophers who receive their knowledge from the supreme Truth, God himself, are the true initiates (ibid. I.32.4). Clement of Alexandria says that "there is only one way of truth, but different paths from different places join it, just like tributaries flowing into a perennial river" (ibid.,I.29.1).

He is not very impressed by Hellenic philosophy which, in his opinion, shows a skill in sophistry and in many cases seems to him to be simply a power operating on the imagination, using arguments to implant false opinions. Therefore, along with Hellenic philosophy, likened to a little fire (stolen as it were by Prometheus) which blazes up helpfully into a useful light, a trace of wisdom, Clement discerns a non-Hellenic philosophy which comes directly from God and is based on divine knowledge and faith. Following already established tradition, he argues that the Hellenes themselves borrowed much of their wisdom. With great satisfaction Clement quotes Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus I to India (about 350-290 B.C.) who wrote in the third volume of his *History of India:*

"However, all that has been said by the ancients about nature is also said by philosophers outside Greece, the Brahmans in India, and the people called the Jews in Syria" (ibid.,I.72.5).

Drawing necessary information from Alexander Polihystor's book *On Pythagorean Symbols* and other unknown Hellenistic sources, Clement also claims that Pythagoras was the disciple of Sonchis, the "highest prophet" of the Egyptians, Plato of Sechnupis of Heliopolis, and Eudoxus the Cnidian of Chonupis (*Strom.* I.69.1). In addition, Pythagoras is claimed to be a pupil of the Assyrian Zaratus and even of the Brahmans (ibid., I.70.1).

For Clement, truth is one and under the sole charge of Wisdom. But the philosophic schools, whether Hellenic or not, "are like the Maenads scattering the limbs of Pentheus, each boasting their own limited claim as the whole truth" (ibid., I.57.1). Clement cannot deny that the term "wise" is applied to "sophists" in the Scripture, so as to describe their excessive concern for language and technique: "they labour throughout their lives over distinctions between words and the appropriate combination and grouping of expressions" (ibid., I.22.4). Are they real bearers of wisdom? Clement cannot provide a clear response. Perhaps they are, if they belong to Clement's party and if wisdom is regarded as the inherited property of Jews and Christians only. For "the truth vouchsafed to the Greeks is not the same as ours, even if it does share the same name" (ibid.,I.98.4).

The Christians' attempts to present themselves as adherents of true ancient philosophy (supposedly deviated from and partly corrupted by the Greeks) were caused by concrete historical and theological circumstances. This early dialogue and contest with Hellenism was a prolongation of the Hellenized Jewish tradition which tried at all costs to show its superiority over Hellenism proper. All possible rhetorical and mythological tricks were used in order to demonstrate that Plato is simply a thief and imitator of Moses.

Since Christianity stands between Hellenism and Judaism, it is not too surprising that the followers of Christ-Logos sometimes described Socrates and Heraclitus as "Christians" (Justin *I Apol.*46.3). The seeds of truth which they cultivated are owed to the sowing *Logos*, the *Logos spermatikos*, to whom all truth found in mankind should be ascribed.[16] The *Logos* doctrine itself has Egyptian roots, as is attested by the so-called *Memphite Theology* and other texts.

According to the Christian writer Eusebius, every nation has a guardian-angel who is responsible for sending down certain knowledge, which is not, however, always complete or correct, because some of those guardian-angels can neither see the invisible, nor ascend to the supreme Truth. Thus, for example, the Phoenicians and Egyptians were taught to worship the heavenly elements, the visible heavenly bodies.

For Eusebius, religion (or devotion, *eusebeia*) and philosophy are not separated but constitute a unity. Christianity is simply the restoration of the true ancient philosophy, because even before Moses' time human beings had their pious philosophy. Therefore Christianity is, in fact, a very ancient way of pious living (*palaiotaton eusebeias politeuma*), and a very ancient form of philosophy (*archaiotate tis philosophia: Demonstratio Evangelica* I.2).[17]

However, Eusebius cannot refrain from exoteric particularism in his assertions about the deficiency of "pagan" philosophy and religion: wherever it contains the truth, it has been stolen from the holy books of the Jews. This widespread opinion is a sheer fantasy, but it stems from the mythical belief in the exceptional status of Jews. Thus, their holy Scripture becomes the only source of wisdom and the very handbook of philosophy. Neither Egyptians or Assyrians, nor Persians or Indians could share such an extremist claim and opinion.

The Greeks had their own political and cultural myth which consists in asserting the superiority of Hellenism: once the Hellenes were pupils of the ancient civilizations in matters of science, religion and mysticism, but they were also able to give a rational foundation to the doctrines of ancient nations (e.g., those of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians), so as to transform and develop them. Origen expresses this idea as follows:

"Celsus praises the barbarians for being capable of discovering doctrines; but he adds to this that the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered and to establish the doctrines and to put them into practice by virtue" (*askesai pros areten: Contra Celsum* I.20.

5. Understanding of Ancient Philosophy by Porphyry and Augustine

Porphyry the Phoenician, that is, the 3rd century Neoplatonist Malchus from Tyre, provides us with further testimonies that *philosophia* and analogous forms of spiritual life and wisdom were not confined to the Graeco-Roman world. Though Plato is the exemplar spokesman of philosophy, Porphyry also speaks of "the ancient philosophy" which includes Persian and Indian thought. The widespread and long-standing opinion that Zoroaster was a precursor of Hellenic philosophy seems to be acceptable to Porphyry, although he ardently fights the anti-cosmic Gnosticism which consciously subverted the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus* and relied upon forgeries on Zoroaster. The hypothetical relationship between Hellenic and Persian philosophy J. Igal describes as groundless and adds:

"Plotinus too had in his schooldays been fascinated by the Persian mirage."[18]

Used in a rather loose sense, which is normal practice in antiquity, the term *philosophia*, as we have said, covers all forms of religious thought and hermeneutics, all theological attitudes and related ways of life. Therefore the "Persian philosophy" might mean religious, political and moral wisdom.

Talking about "the Persian mirage", J. Igal follows A. J. Festugiere who in the first volume of his fundamental research work *La Revelation d'Hermes Trismegiste* says (perhaps following F. Cumont) that the Graeco-Roman world in Porphyry's own time was smitten by the *mirage oriental*.[19] This assertion means that the Romans and Greeks were wrong when they viewed Oriental forms of wisdom as older and better, more suitable for spiritual realization and containing purer ideas of the deity, based on direct revelations which transcend the narrow rationalism and pragmatism of their own attitudes. Thus being under the sway of some irrational dreams and in a weakened state of mind, flooded by the seductive imagination, they turned to the East in their search for the ancient ways of life and divine wisdom. It is more likely that A. J. Festugiere himself is wrong in his judgement, because otherwise we would be forced to regard the Hellenic philosophers and men of aristocratic culture as idiots who cannot know what they really want and what is worthy of pursuit. However, our concern is not to criticize the brilliant Catholic scholar, but to show that for the Graeco-Romans the existence of ancient or simply foreign philosophies (albeit different from their own) was a self-evident fact.

Relying on the testimonies collected by the Babylonian Bardesanes, i.e., Bar Daisan of Edessa, Porphyry in *De abstinentia* depicts Indian philosophers who worship the deity with pious reverence, setting apart the whole day and most of the night for hymns and prayers to the gods. They are the theosophists, or gymnosophists, divided into Brahmans and

Samanaeans. Both are concerned with divine wisdom. According to Porphyry:

"Of these philosophers, some live on the mountains, and others on the banks of the river Ganges… And neither among those Samanaeans nor among the Brahmans whom I have already mentioned, has any sophist come forward, as have so many among the Greeks, to perplex with doubts by asking where would we be if every one should copy their example" (*De abst.* IV.16-18).

From the Hellenistic age onwards the constant view prevailed that Indian gymnosophists "philosophized", and "philosophizing" here means to live in silent solitude and devotion, engaged in prayer and trying to free the soul from the body. The aim of this philosophy, also called the *mores ac disciplina Indorum* by Porphyry, consists in achieving immortality. The Indian gymnosophists had philosophical doctrines about the immortality of the soul, righteousness and purification, the duty of worshipping Deity and the possibility of the soul's deliverance from the cycle of existence. As Megasthenes already claimed, some Indian Brahmans held that:

"God was light, but not such light as we see with the eye, nor such as the sun or fire, but God is with them the Word – by which they mean… the discourse of intellect, whereby the hidden mysteries of knowledge are discerned by the wise. (fr. LIV).

"On many points their opinions coincide with those of the Greeks, for like them they say that the world had a beginning, and is liable to destruction, and is in shape spherical, and that the Deity who made it, and who governs it, is diffused through all its parts. They hold that various first principles operate in the universe, and that water was the principle employed in the making of the world. In addition to the four elements there is a fifth agency, from which the heaven and the stars were produced. The earth is placed in the centre of the universe. Concerning generation, and the nature of the soul, and many other subjects, they express views like those maintained by the Greeks. They wrap up their doctrines about immortality and future judgement, and kindred topics, in allegories, after the manner of Plato" (fr. XLI).

Thus nobody in the Graeco-Roman world would doubt the existence of Indian philosophy as such. But the problem, posed by Porphyry, arises from the awareness that only a tiny minority is able to follow the way of philosophy seriously. Porphyry (who partly misunderstood the soteriological functions of any integral sacred tradition which has both exoteric and esoteric dimensions) is in search of some universal way of liberation, following which every soul could escape from the cycle of existence.

Permanent escape with no return was not the right Platonic ideal, but Augustine perfectly understood Porphyry's dream, thinking that Christianity is that single universal way which Porphyry did not find.

According to Augustine's reports, Porphyry held that only the Principles (*principia, archai*), i.e., (1) the One, or the Father, and (2) the Father's Intellect (*Patrikos Nous*) are able to purify souls to such an extent that they could escape rebirth (*palingenesis*) within the cycle of transmigration and abide forever with the Father.[20]

According to Augustine, Porphyry maintained that an exclusively philosophical ascent is reserved just for a few. Therefore this pupil of Plotinus, not always faithful to the doctrines of his master, tried to find "a universal way for the liberation of the soul, deriving from some true philosophy, or the *mores* and *disciplina* of the Indians, or the ascent of the Chaldeans, or any other way".[21] At this point Augustine becomes angry and reproaches Porphyry (who admitted the use of theurgy only for the minor pneumatic ascent, contrary to Iamblichus and other later Neoplatonists) with ardent Christian zeal:

"You did not get this doctrine from Plato. It was your Chaldean teachers who persuaded you to bring human weakness up into the exalted heights of universe, into the ether and empyrean, up to the heavenly firmaments, so your gods might be able to give supernatural revelations to the theurgists. Yet you consider yourself superior to such supernatural knowledge, in virtue of your intellectual life. You, of course, feel that, as a philosopher, you have not the slightest need of the purifications of theurgic art. Yet as a kind of repayment of your debt to those masters of yours, you prescribe such purgations to others… The result is, naturally, that since the vast majority have no taste for philosophy, you collect far more clients for those secret and illegal masters of yours than candidates for the Platonic schools. You have made yourself the preacher and the angel of those unclean spirits who pretend to be gods of the ether; they have promised you that those who have been purified in their pneumatic soul, by theurgic art, although they cannot, indeed, return to the Father, will have their dwelling among the gods of the ether, above the levels of the air" (*Civ. Dei* X.27).

Despite the negative attitude towards the Chaldean theurgy and its "fantastic illusions", as well as "all the baseless opinions of all the philosophers" (ibid., VIII.1), Augustine is quite sympathetic to his former teachers, the Platonists and their master Plato, "who went to Egypt to acquire all the highly prized teachings given there" (ibid. VIII.4). He argues as follows:

"If Plato says that the wise man is the man who imitates, knows and loves God, and that participation in this God brings man happiness, what need is there to examine the other philosophers? There are none who come nearer to us than the Platonists" (ibid. VIII.5).

"The same concepts may have been held also by Italian philosophers, because of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, and perhaps by some others of the same way of thinking and from the same part of the world. There may be others to be found who perceived and taught this truth among those who were esteemed as sages or philosophers in other nations: Libyans of Atlas, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Scythians, Gauls, Spaniards. Whoever they may have been, we rank such thinkers above all others and acknowledge them as representing the closest approximation to our Christian position" (ibid. VIII.9).

A long time before Augustine, Diogenes Laertius stated that philosophy was diffused among the nations of North Africa, the gymnosophists of India, the Magi of Anatolia, the Druids and so on. But for Augustine only those are true philosophers whose teachings are close to those of Plato and the Platonic tradition. The list of them (which includes Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, etc.) is really impressive. The true philosophers have conceived of the supreme God as the Creator of all things. They argue that we are created in His image and derive from this one God all goodness and knowledge.

Philosophy understood in this way leads to the light of knowledge (knowledge of God and of ourselves), happiness and the blessedness of life. Therefore forgetting for a while all reservations regarding "polytheism" and the "daemonic intermediaries between men and gods", Augustine approves Plato's definition of the Sovereign Good and the life in accord with virtue which is possible only for those who strive to imitate God:

"Plato has no hesitation in asserting that to be a philosopher is to love God, whose nature is immaterial. It immediately follows that the seeker after wisdom (which is the meaning of *philo-sophos*) will only attain to happiness when he has begun to enjoy God" (ibid. VIII.8).

6. From Egyptian Soil to Hellas

Isocrates insisted that philosophy is a product of Egypt brought to Greece and Italy by Pythagoras, and one of the earliest attested uses of the term *philosophia* comes from *Bousiris* of Isocrates. Contrary to the convictions maintained by the ancient Hellenes themselves and regarded by them as a self-evident truth, modern scholars dismissed Egypt as the initial cradle of philosophy. This opinion was established during recent centuries and can be viewed as a consequence of the sustained attack on the "wisdom" of Egypt pursued by certain radically disposed Christians and modern positivists. The denial that Egyptians were capable of developing any kind of philosophical thought is a result of the grave ideological errors and superstitions which have prevailed in the modern Western world since the Enlightenment and have almost destroyed (or grossly deformed) the Christian tradition itself.

Though the Hellenic philosophers and scientists credited the Egyptians with achievements in all sciences and practical wisdom, regarding them as the model to be imitated and surpassed in almost every field of learning and art, modern scholars reject all these testimonies as groundless. The Egyptians could not have influenced Solon, Thales, Pythagoras and Plato, they say, simply because they did not have philosophy. Why? Because they are morbid and lifeless, not sufficiently rational and creative; because the Aryan Model (to use M. Bernal's term) "better" explains the "progress of civilization"; because they are pleasure-loving people, lacking all deep religious feeling, idealism and spirituality (in sharp contrast with Winckelmann's and Wilamovitz-Moellendorf's Greeks, who have all possible positive qualities, creative energies and virtues in abundance). In short, because the Egyptians belong to the undeveloped, lower and exotic race and represent by themselves the so-called "mytho-poetical" level of thought. A. Gardiner's sentence delivered in 1927 is almost generally accepted as axiomatic:

"Despite the reputation for philosophic wisdom attributed to the Egyptians by the Greeks, no people has ever shown itself more averse from speculations or more wholeheartedly devoted to material interests; and if they paid an exaggerated attention to funerary observances, it was because the continuance of earthly pursuits and pleasures was felt to be at stake, assuredly not out of any curiosity as to the why and whither of human life".[22]

Similarly W. K. C. Guthrie in *A History of Greek Philosophy* says:

"Yet the torch of philosophy was not lit in Egypt, for they lacked the necessary spark which the Greeks possessed so strongly and embodied in their word *philosophia*".[23]

Another influential modern thinker and scientist, B. Russel, gives an equally dogmatic and superficial assertion:

"Philosophy begins when someone asks a general question, and so does science. The first people to evince this kind of activity were the Greeks. Philosophy and science, as we know them, are Greek inventions… Philosophy and science begin with Thales of Miletus in the early sixth century B.C."[24]

M. Bernal, despite his shortcomings and sometimes eccentric "afro-mythology" (which is disputable in many respects) raises the opposite point of view arguing that:

"After the crushing of Neoplatonism, the Hellenic, pagan descendants of Egyptian religion, and Gnosticism, its Judaeo-Christian counterpart, Christian thinkers tamed Egyptian religion by turning it into philosophy".[25] "The three schools of thought that emerged from the debris of Egyptian religion were Hermeticism, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. The Hermeticists remained defiantly Egyptian, the Neoplatonists were more Hellenized and focussed their devotion on the 'divine Plato', while the Gnostics saw themselves as Christians… There is little doubt that Hermeticism was the earliest of the three and had a critical influence on the formation of the other two movements."[26]

The question regarding the origins of Hermeticism, Platonism, and Gnosticism is not as simple as this schematic picture would like to suggest. But in certain respects this straightforward perspective is a reinterpretation and reestablishment of the ancient views firmly held, among others, by Plutarch, the Middle Platonist and Delphic priest, who, following Herodotus and other Hellenic historians, argued that much of Hellenic philosophy had been introduced from Egypt. Plutarch believed in an essential unity between Egyptian and Hellenic religion, despite their different styles of expression:

"Nor do we think of the gods as different gods among different peoples, nor as barbarian gods and Hellenic gods, nor as southern and northern gods" (*De Iside et Osiride* 67).

At the same time he maintained that the Egyptian religion is older, purer and more profound, because when "men make use of consecrated symbols", some employed symbols that are obscure, but others those that are clear, "in guiding the intelligence toward things divine". Further discussing this subject Plutarch adds:

"Therefore in these matters above all we should take as a guide into mysteries the understanding which philosophy gives (*logon ek philosophias mustagogon*)… The fact that everything is to be referred to understanding (*epi ton logon*) we may gather from the Egyptians themselves" (ibid.68).

In short, Egyptian hermeneutics (which explains religious myths and rites) itself constitutes a part of philosophy. It is not by accident that this assertion is followed by the remark about the festival in honour of Hermes (Thoth) during which the Egyptians eat honey and figs, saying the while "sweet is truth" (*gluku he aletheia*: ibid.68).

"Truth" is a key word here, because evidently it is the Egyptian *maat*, related to the divine scribe Thoth, god of all wisdom, philosophy, mysteries, sacred rites and creative "magic" (*heka*). The sensible and noetic parts of philosophy, guided by Thoth, may be likened to the robes of Isis and Osiris respectively. The robes of Isis are variegated in their colours, "for her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything, light and darkness, day and night, fire and water, life and death, beginning and end. But the robe of Osiris has no shading or variety in its colour, but only one single colour like to light" (ibid.77). Therefore the noetic understanding, or the Osirian intellection (when Osiris and Ra constitute the unity, because without the intelligible light of Ra Osiris lies in the psychic darkness) is pure and simple, "shining through the soul like a flash of lightning", and it affords an opportunity to touch and see at once.

In order to show a relationship between the Egyptian symbols and philosophical exegesis we should provide another excerpt from *De Iside et Osiride*. Plutarchus writes:

"For this reason Plato and Aristotle call this part of philosophy the epoptic or mystic part, inasmuch as those who have passed beyond these conjectural and confused matters of all sorts by means of reason (*to logo*) proceed by leaps and bounds to that primary, simple, and immaterial principle; and when they have somehow attained contact with the pure truth abiding about it, they think that they have the whole philosophy completely, as it were, within their grasp.

"This idea at the present time the priests intimate with great circumspection in acquitting themselves of this religious secret and in trying to conceal it: that this god Osiris is the ruler and king of the dead… But he himself is far removed from the earth, uncontaminated and unpolluted and pure from all matter that is subject to destruction and death; but for the souls of men here, which are compassed about by bodies and emotions, there is no association with this god except in so far as they may attain to a dim vision of his presence by means of the apperception which philosophy affords (*plen hoson oneiratos amaurou thigein noesei dia philosophias*). But when these souls are set free and migrate into the realm of the invisible and the unseen, the dispassionate and the pure, then this god becomes their leader and king, since it is on him that they are bound to be dependent in their insatiate contemplation and yearning for that beauty which is for men unutterable and indescribable. With this beauty Isis, as the ancient story declares, is for ever enamoured and pursues it and consorts with it and fills our earth here with all things fair and good that partake of generation" (ibid.77-78).

This text is no less than a clear example of the Egyptian "Platonism" – not just a reading of Plutarch. Isis, the mistress of "transformative magic" (or rather of blissful theurgy) itself stands as a Lady Philosophy, enamoured of the immaterial Principle.

Modern scholars, deprived of all theurgic imagination and grace, may still insist on their rejection of Egyptian philosophy, but the fact remains that Pythagoras and Plato brought something important from Egypt, connected with the theory of Ideas, the divine Archetypes and their images or symbols, the mathematical sciences, regarded in a mystical sense, and the conception of the immortal winged soul (*ba*) wandering in search of her true identity and thereby following the precept of Horus-Ra (Apollo): Know Thyself. The soul seeks to know truth (*maat*) and live by it. When her ascent is completed, the soul, turned into the luminous intellect (*akh*), contemplates the Forms in the solar barque of Ra. It is not too difficult to find the prototypes of images used in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Most probably the *Republic* is also based on the Egyptian models. According to Krantor (as related by Proclus) "Plato's contemporaries mocked him, saying that he was not inventor of his *politeia*, but that he had copied Egyptian institutions".[27] The Egyptian form of government was imitated by the Pythagoreans, along with the methods of philosophical askesis, aimed at purifying the human soul and harmonizing with the perfectly arranged state regarded as an *imago* of the divine cosmos, both sensible and noetic.

Ch. Evangeliou maintains that the Pythagorean pursuit of mathematical sciences and care of the soul are brought from Egypt:

"Through Plato and the Platonic tradition this type of philosophy more than any other contributed to shaping the Hellenic view of man, as an ignorant captive whose true liberator is Lady Philosophy".[28]

However, we must remember that certain selected ideas and elements, brought from Egyptian soil to Hellas, were removed from the context of integral sacred civilization and put into the foreign "barbaric" environment where these elements (though synthesized and artificially united in the new compound) inevitably stood outside of the main stream of life. They could function only as a sort of Pythagorean "esoterism", as a clearly defined "philosophy", rationalistic exceptionalism, quite strange and even dangerous for the rest of society. Maybe this is the reason why Pythagoreans were persecuted and Socrates sentenced to death. It was quite different in Egypt, where every "philosopher" belonged to the state-staff and had no need to define himself as an exceptional case. It is possible that the nickname *philosophos* itself betrays this tension between the distant wisdom (still the possession of Egypt) and the local socio-political and psychological climate in Greece and Italy, the mental structures of which were organized according to the different value patterns. Perhaps this radical tension "revolutionized" the Hellenic thought and, partly at least, can explain the rise of independent philosophical discourses, aimed at the fundamental questioning of everything.

In a sense, this unnaturally mutated "beast", a hybrid fuelled by the powerful enthusiasm of sophists, physiologists, and rationalists, betrayed both Egypt and the archaic past of Greece. For this or some similar reason P. Kingsley claims that Plato had killed his "father" Parmenides, arguing as follows:

"What would soon be covered over and rationalized in Greece was preserved and developed in India. What in the West had been an aspect of mystery, of initiation, became classified and formalized in the East".[29]

The great Traditionalist writer F. Schuon makes an acute observation in the same vein:

"On the whole, Plato expressed sacred truths in a language that had already become profane – profane because rational and discursive rather than intuitive and symbolist, or because it followed too closely the contingences and humours of the mirror that is the mind – whereas

Aristotle placed truth itself, and not merely its expression, on a profane and 'humanistic' plane."[30]

Neither P. Kingsley's, nor F. Schuon's claims can be accepted straightforwardly – they require further discussion, because Plato's language may be regarded not as "profane" but simply as "different", more suited to the contemporary milieu of Hellenic thought which required rational argumentation and definition. In a sense, we can speak of Plato as Parmenides *redivivus*: the vehicle of pedagogical persuasion was transformed (and thereby Parmenides, like the archetypal Osiris, was ritually "killed"). However, the Parmenidean spirit "resurrected" was reinforced and strengthened by the divine Plato.

7. Translatability of Divine Names in Ancient Civilizations

The question why so many distinct forms of spirituality and intellectual life may be named and understood as "philosophy", should perhaps be answered by involving the so-called "principle of translatability", discussed by Jan Assmann in respect to Egyptian and Near Eastern religions.[31] The conviction that God or the gods are universal led to the semantic dimension that makes names translatable. This means that every nation has essentially the same gods. Therefore the basic structure of the spiritual path leading to first principles everywhere must be analogous, though different in style and details. According to Aristotle (*De philosoph.*, fr.8), wisdom (*sophia*) covers any ingenious invention and conception (all of which ultimately are gifts, sent down by the gods); therefore to do any thing well, skillfully, according to the divine paradigms and models, is to follow the way of "wisdom" which finally leads to the highest metaphysical goals, to the noetic realm where Wisdom itself, the graceful goddess, dwells. No wonder that every nation loves wisdom and has certain "lovers of wisdom", be they goldsmiths, artists, healers, singers, priests, or magicians.

The practice of translating and interpreting foreign divine names is found already established in the Sumerian and Akkadian glossaries dated from the third millennium B.C. In ancient Mesopotamia one can find countless lists of gods in two or three languages. For example, the explanatory list *Anu sha Ameli* gives not only the Sumerian and Akkadian names of the gods, but also the functional definitions of every deity, i.e. those attributes which serve as the main criteria for equation and translation. In the Kassite period (about 1730-1155 B.C.) such explanatory lists are expanded to include the divine names in Amorite, Hurrite, Elamite and Kassite languages. This theological interpretation, aimed at making explicit the underlying "meaning" of divine names, is based on universal metaphysics (covered by the mythical images, qualities, symbols) and international law. According to Jan Assmann:

"The names, iconographies, and rites – in short, the cultures – differ, but the gods are the same. This concept of religion as the common background of cultural diversity and the principle of cultural translatability eventually led to the late Hellenistic mentality for which the names of the gods mattered little in view of the overwhelming natural evidence of their existence".[32]

This kind of comparative hermeneutics is not explicitly developed in the early pharaonic Egypt due to its closed and self-sufficient character, but Egyptian metaphysics are even more overwhelmingly based upon evident reality and can serve as a firm theological ground for such practices as flourished especially in Hellenistic times. In the *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 B.C.) it is unequivocally stated: all names are those of one God (*CT* 4.10). God is both transcendent and immanent. In his immanent aspect of the creative theophany, God is "million" (or infinity, *heh*) into which he has transformed himself. Therefore the intelligible solar Deity is *hehu* whose limits are not known, scarab (*kheper*) whose body is not known, for he is like the boundless Light (*Leiden stela* V.70). The One who transforms himself into the totality of manifestations (*kheperu*), divine forces (*sekhemu*), all of the gods (*neteru*) and levels of being, nonetheless remains intact in his transcendence.

All gods are comprised in the One, "the One Alone who created what is, the illustrious *bau* of gods and humans" (*Pap. Berlin* 3030.8-9). Therefore this One God, who became two "at the beginning" of noetic creation, is praised in a Ramesside magical papyrus of the XIX Dynasty (1295-1188 B.C.) as follows:

> "Hail, the One who makes himself into millions,
> Whose length and breath are limitless.
> Power in readiness, who gave birth to himself,
> Uraeus with great flame;
> Great of magic with secret form,
> Secret *ba*, to whom respect is shown…
> Amun, who remains in possession of all things,
> This God who established the earth by his providence".

The later Neoplatonists could easily find Pythagorean and Platonic principles in the Egyptian theologies, because these theologies operated within the same system of religious and philosophical translatability, in addition to the plausible premise that Platonism itself (in its rather concealed essential form) directly or indirectly derived from Egyptian lore.

One is tempted to argue that so-called "ancient polytheisms" functioned as a technique of translation, but ought to be careful when dealing with terms. Derogatory terms, such as the Latin *paganus* (peasant, rustic, unlearned, along with additional connotations of idolatry and *superstitio)*, ironically become the opposites of supposedly "learned", "advanced" and therefore "progressive" Jewish or Christian zealotry, or such concepts as Greek "polytheism" (*polutheia*) and "idolatry" (*eidolatria*), used to describe Graeco-Roman religion and even highly articulated mystical philosophy, are very inaccurate, pejorative and simplifying slogans, if not merely ideological stamps.

From the third millennium B.C. onwards the ancient theologies held that the Principle of all there is, is one, or that the One God may wear different ontological "masks" and have multiple hidden and revealed powers. The plurality of gods is not supposed to affect the unity of God from which all the noetic and psychic manifestations come forth. However, the Christian Apologists established a superficially simple model, according to which mankind had progressed from heavily demonized polytheism to the highly idealized monotheism under the aegis of Christianity. This seductive idea of straightforward progress (from which the modern idea of progress derives) is rather anachronistic, but still captures the Christian and secular Western mentality. And this is despite the fact that "not only philosophers, but a very substantial portion of late antique pagans was consciously monotheistic".[33] According to P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede:

"Far from arising as a reaction to Christianity, pagan monotheism was a deeply rooted trend in ancient philosophy which developed under its own momentum, broadening sufficiently to embrace a good part of the population. Indeed we are inclined to believe that Christian monotheism is, historically speaking, part of this broader development. Christianity did not convince because it was monotheistic, rather it would appear that in order to convince, it had to be monotheistic…" [34]

The Jewish and Christian religions (labelled as counter-religions by J. Assmann, because they reject and repudiate everything that went before and what is outside themselves as "paganism"[31]) act as a means of intercultural estrangement and untranslatability. They are "exclusive" monotheisms, according to the classification provided by J. P. Kenney.[36] Their exclusiveness is built more on the mythical dissociation from *ethnikos*, those who are not God's chosen people, than on the affirming oneness of God. Therefore they were in need of a special esoteric dimension which would at least allow them to accept elements of Hellenic mysticism and philosophy. One cannot claim that esoterism is simply constituted by the "remains of translatability" (i.e., by the remains of certain *philosophia perennis*) put into the underground, due to the general intolerance in the name of revelation. However, one ought to remember that most of the Christian thinkers, who tried to introduce a translatability (albeit with great reservations), themselves sooner or later felt under suspicion of their co-religionists. Therefore Dionysius the Areopagite was forced to perform a magnificent trick by using clever deception in order to integrate the Procline metaphysics and theurgy into Christian theology and then to create the Neoplatonic sacramental mysticism within Christian civilization.

When Christian "monotheists", who articulated their theology in Platonic terms, accused somebody as being "polytheist" or *paganus*, it was because they would not tolerate any other version of truth. Therefore Olympiodorus, the Alexandrian philosopher of 6th century A.D., applied to the Christians as follows:

"We too are aware that the first cause is one, namely God; for there cannot be many first causes. Indeed that first does not even have a name" (*In Gorg.*32).

For those Christians who emerged from the radicalized Jewish tradition and suddenly acquired a huge power it was difficult to accept that "the God is no less a philosopher than a prophet" (Plutarch *Moral.*385b). According to the apt remark made by Frithjof Schuon:

"Those who champion an unreserved hostility to Hellenism and a reduction of all wisdom to a voluntarist and emotional perspective strangely lose sight of the overwhelmingly obvious fact that conceptualizing and speculative metaphysical thought is in the theomorphic nature of man, and that such thought cannot therefore by definition be 'carnal' and 'vain', as opposed to the penitential and mystically experimental 'wisdom' which they themselves advocate.

"History and experience teach us that there is one thing human nature finds particularly difficult, and that is that to be just; to be perfectly objective is, in a way to die… Religious zealots are the first to know the meaning of spiritual death, and one of the motives for their zeal is precisely their ignorance of the presence of this mystery among their adversaries; but there are different ways of dying and different degrees of death…"[37]

8. Heracles and Philosophical Ascent

The Pythagoreans kept their doctrines secret. However, as is often the case, true esoteric teachings are not intended to "teach" some fascinating secret theories and ideas, but to provide a spiritual method and guidance in order to actualize these ideas. They are designed to heal and transform the soul. If Pythagoras was coming not to teach but to heal, according to the ancient account (Ael. *VH.*4.17), thus playing the role of Asclepius, or Asgelatas (Gula of Isin, the "great physician", *azugallatu*), or of the Egyptian Imhotep, adopted son of Ptah, then he stands in the long tradition of divine avatars, spiritual masters and healers who not only provide a means for purifying the soul, but show the way to regain one's true identity and immortality. This is the ultimate aim of Pythagorean philosophy, not simply doing science and studying mathematics.

In this regard Plotinus clearly states:

"Our concern is not to be free of sin, but to be god" (*Enn.* I.2.6.2-3).

Thereby he repeats the ancient Egyptian theurgic ideal of becoming "like a god", assuming the role of one of *neteru* (since all *neteru* are aspects, functions, masks, and names of the supreme Principle), and sharing in the demiurgic activity and care of the world. Like the idea of becoming a god (similar to the Platonic admonition found in the *Theaetetus* 176b), an *imago dei* doctrine is held in the *Instruction for King Merikare* which belongs to the Middle Kingdom wisdom-literature. This text describes the established link between God and humanity through *maat*, sacred kingship, and cultic activities:

> "Well provided are the humans, the herd of God.
> For their sake He created heaven and earth…
> They are his images (*snn*), they have come forth from his body.
> For their sake he rises in the heavens,
> For them he created the plants and the animals,
> Fowl and fish, so that they might eat…
> He created for them rulers "in the egg"
> [i.e., still in the archetypal realm]…
> He created for them *heka* as a weapon…
> God knows every name."[38]

For the image to be returned to its archetype, certain theurgic rites or their philosophical counterparts are required. Therefore the early Pythagorean philosophy (which appeared more than 1500 years after the *Instruction for King Merikare* was composed) aims at restoring the human being as an *imago dei* through the philosophical mysteries which consist in (1) ritual purification (*katharmos*), including purification through virtues and reason, (2) initiation, or transmission of *paradosis* ("tradition", an esoteric doctrine) and power from the spiritual "father" to his "son", and (3) the opening of the spiritual eye (due to the inner alchemical transformation of the soul) and mystical vision (*epopteia*) of truth, or union with the deity.

The *epopteia* is tantamount to the seeing of the true "form of a god" (*aru en neter: jrw n ntr*), or contemplating the Forms, speaking in Platonic terms. The Forms, or Ideas, are the archetypal Stars, and "stars" in the hieroglyphic script may stand for *neteru*, "gods" (Horapollo *Hier.* I.13). The word which means a star, *seba,* is phonetically the same as that which stands for teaching, learning, wisdom, consequently an "idea", something that belongs to the realm of Intellect, to the supervision of Thoth. Like the knowledge of Thoth, Pythagorean knowledge is carefully and silently guarded in the breast (Porph. *Vita Pyth.*57). This knowledge concerns the doctrine of intelligibles, world order, right living, punishment, purification, and rebirth which means attaining immortality at the level of Osiris-Ra, i.e., in the noetic realm of the gods, numbers, or divine lights.

The main Pythagorean hero in this pursuit of immortality and divine status is Heracles, the Phoenician Melqart. Therefore the imitation of Heracles stands as a paradigm for becoming like a god through initiation, spiritual labours, death and final *apotheosis*. For this reason Apollonius of Tyana modelled himself on the ideal image of Heracles, and Milo of Croton (according to the testimony of Diodorus: *Bibl. hist.*12.9.2-6), who himself belonged to the first generation of the Pythagorean school, is portrayed as dressed in the costume of Heracles and leading the people of Croton against their enemies in 510 B.C.

Heracles initially is the Babylonian Nergal, usually regarded as the husband of Ereskigal, queen of the underworld, and identified with Erra, Erragal, the god of pestilences and plagues. If he causes an ill, he may equally avert it, be it physical or spiritual illness. Therefore the amulets of Heracles *alexikakos*, the averter of evil, are used in everyday life. The Pythagorean hero Heracles no less trusts in his own strength, thus being an exemplar Philosopher, the paradigm of spiritual *askesis* and combat with passions. The mythical motifs and images, such as the combat with the lion and with the seven-headed snake clearly are of the Mesopotamian origin. The slayings of various monsters are modelled on (1) the slaying of Humbaba by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and (2) the motifs from the Babylonian cosmogonical epic *Enuma elish*.

The widespread iconographic image of the club-bearer Heracles, who is not only the paradigmatic hero of Pythagoreans, but (along with Socrates) the first teacher and archegete of the Cynic tradition, may be related to the Indian Pasupata teacher Lakulisa, the Lord of the Club. Heracles' lion skin recalls Shiva's leopard skin and similar skins of the Egyptian sem-priests. Like the Sumero-Akkadian Gilgamesh (*Bilga-mes*, "youth-old-man", a ruler of Uruk at circa 2600 B.C. (later divinized as a form of dying god Dumuzi and made a judge in the realm of the dead) he seeks to overcome the structures of destiny and death by force. Gilgamesh fails in overcoming his humanity, but finally becomes a model for sage and philosopher, a man with the task of harmonizing himself with the great rhythms of cosmic destiny and order, for he builds the wall of Uruk, the sacred enclosure of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse. This *temenos* and sacred building constitutes a well measured *mandala* which reflects the divine prototypes, "a measure of immortality" man can seek.

The walled city is a symbol of the universe and its microcosmic counterpart, Perfect Man. The seven wise men laid its foundations. It has a defensive magic circle for the seeds of life, thus preserving the cosmic order, holiness, and wisdom. In its role as an exemplar *politeia* this semi-imaginary city may symbolize the Pythagorean political philosophy.

As a ruler of Uruk Gilgamesh had the title *en* which united in his person (paradigmatic mask) two aspects of that office: magical and martial. The magical powers of the *en* are not limited to his ritual role, but continued to be effective after his death: from them emanate powers which sustain "tradition" (*paradosis*) and even make orchards, fields and pastures grow green and thrive. The same *ka*-power is attributed to the dead Egyptian pharaoh who becomes Osiris and repeats his divine destiny.

The Middle Platonist Plutarch (despite his conviction of the essential identity of Egyptian and Hellenic religions) did not accept the idea about the foreign origins of the Hellenic hero, Heracles, because neither Homer nor Hesiod ever mentioned an Egyptian or a Phoenician Heracles. Therefore Plutarch attacks the claim of Herodotus:

"He says that the Greeks learned about processions and national festivals from the Egyptians as well as the worship of the twelve gods; the very name of Dionysus, he says, was learnt from the Egyptians by Melampus, and he taught the rest of the Greeks; and the mysteries and secret rituals connected with Demeter were brought from Egypt by the daughters of Danaos… Nor is this the worst. He traces the ancestry of Heracles to Perseus and says Perseus, according to the Persian account, was an Assyrian; 'and the chiefs of the Dorians' he says, 'would be established as pure-blooded Egyptians…'; not only is he anxious to establish an Egyptian and a Phoenician Heracles; he says that our own Heracles was born after the other two…" (*De malig.*13-14).

Recent investigations have proved that Plutarch was wrong about Heracles. Even worse: Homer and Hesiod themselves faithfully followed the Eastern poetical, mythological, and generic paradigms, also incorporating the related ideas. Those who are the most challenging among the contemporary writers even try to establish as plausible the Egyptian derivation of Homer's name (or title), linking it with *hemuter* (*hmwt-t*), later Coptic *hmr*, meaning spell, act or actor of speech.[30] According to the Hellenic tradition itself, the so-called Dorian invasion was simply "the return of the Heraclids": the Dorian kings regarded themselves as divine descendants from Heracles through the Egyptian and Phoenician ancestors. The Egyptian "Heracles" is Montu (*Mntw*), the god of archery and war, pictured as a falcon-bull, or perhaps also Horus in his hypostasis of the avenger-warrior and hero who restores *maat*, the world order.

Like the Hellenic club-bearer Heracles, the Indian god Shiva of the Pashupatas has both the feline skin and the club. Therefore it is easy to see why on the Kushan coins the figure of Heracles is replaced by the similar figure of Shiva. On the other hand, Heracles is identified with Dionysus. For this reason to imitate Heracles is tantamount to imitating Dionysus and Shiva – to seek the divine identity through the Dionysian frenzy, behaving like madmen or animals (for animals are wise: not only the ancient hunters, but even Ibn al-'Arabi talk about a certain "animal wisdom") often seeking after dishonour in the same manner as the Muslim dervishes and malamatis have sought.

According to Herodotus, "the so-called Orphic or Bacchic rites… are really Egyptian and Pythagorean" (*Hist.* II.81). In both cases the attaining of wisdom, salvation, and enlightenment is accomplished not through discursive reasoning and cultivation of sciences, but through the inner passage (philosophical ascent) leading upwards to the royal crown mounted on the sacred pillar, that is the central cosmic column or *axis mundi.* This essentially invisible macrocosmic and microcosmic axis is represented by the sacred tree, the spinal column of Osiris (*djed* erect pillar), the body of the goddess Nut (Heaven) or the theurgic ladder constructed by the rays of divine light. This ladder constitutes the way towards union (*henosis*).

G. Zuntz rejected such unity with a god, thinking it may have been acceptable in Egypt, but not in Greece: "no Greek cult of any kind ever aimed to achieve identity of god and worshipper, alive or dead".[40] E. Hornung rejected this aspiration for the Egyptians as well, claiming that they "never experienced a longing for union with the deity."[40] Such blind assertions stand contrary to the evidence provided by the texts and the sound metaphysics itself, showing how brilliant modern scholars try to project into the ancient mysteries their own prejudices and states of mind. They are adherents of a persistent mythology, so dear to all sorts of rationalists and functioning as if it were their main magic talisman – a mythology which holds that the ancient philosophy and the world itself are moving from so-called "irrationality", monkey-like backwardness, to "rationality" (which by now is elevated to the status of the scientific, schizophreny, terrorism, and tyranny), i.e., from *muthos* to *logos.*

9. From Akhenaten to Thales

At the beginning of the second millenium B.C., under the influence of the increasing unification and organization of the Near Eastern states, every one of which was regarded as the mirror-image of the macrocosmic state of the gods or its prolongation, the priests and sages became increasingly concerned with questions of universal order and its ruling principle, of divine archetypes and their images, of the One and the Many. It would be incorrect to think that all these questions and subjects were not explored much earlier, but at that time they provoked and suggested slightly different answers, due to the monistic tendency of thought. The approached problems were investigated and dealt with by mythological and theological means, taking mythology to the limits of its expressiveness. According to Thomas McEvilley:

"What would emerge from the dissolution of myth was the birth of philosophy – and its first great topic was Oneness".[42]

The author is incorrect in speaking about "the dissolution of myth": it is more likely that myth simply changed the imaginal form of presentation. In a certain sense, *logos* (a rational discourse, speech, discursive reason) is only one particular instance of the great ontological Meta-myth (close to the Hindu *Maya,* the Egyptian *Heka*) which governs the whole realm of becoming, that of moving images and reflections. Within this overwhelmingly magic frame, which introduces something like a mythical fundament of ontology, *logos* simply means significant and meaningful speech (that which is in accord with the archetypal Ideas), the multi-dimensional human mind with all of its images, concepts, thoughts, feelings, and visions which can be symbolically expressed orally or in writing and has an open or hidden coherence. Therefore, as Ch. Evangeliou pointed out:

"In this broad sense, not only great Hellenic philosophers, but every human being, who is unimpaired and prepared to make careful and meaningful use of the innate *logos*, is naturally a logical and rational being, peripatetically speaking".[43]

The Hellenic tradition insists that almost all of the first Greek philosophers, mystagogues, and scientists were pupils of the Egyptian priests. As Diodorus Siculus says, not only Orpheus took part in the feasts of the Dionysian (i.e., Osirian) mysteries in Egypt (*Bibl. hist.* I.23.2), but also Homer himself visited the country (ibid. I.69). Behind the Greek obsession with geometry (which Thales is said to have brought from Egypt) stand the Egyptian methods of measurement along with the mystical theory of forms and numbers which grounds the use of geometry in the demiurgic cosmogony, repeated after the annual flood, when the primordial hill, the noetic "stone" of light, emerges from the waters of Nun. Geometry and astronomy are the two disciplines to which the Greek authors most often refer, though Hellenic astronomy derives from Mesopotamia. Be that as it may, geometry and astronomy (both understood in the ancient sense of divine sciences) became pillars of an emerging cultural synthesis in Greece which marked the appearance of a distinct rational, philosophical and scientific discourse.

Theology is also mentioned among the things learned abroad, though the Egyptian priests were reluctant to reveal the mysteries to their guests. For example, Plato is credited with having learned geometry, theology and priestly knowledge in general during his stay in Egypt probably around 390 B.C. In his later works Plato praised Egyptian art and music, arguing for their adoption in Greece. For Plato, the return to the ideal ancient institutions means return to Egypt, as if the deeper one goes towards the true and primordial Hellenic roots, the closer one approaches the sacred pharaonic Egypt. The tradition of Plato's theological studies in Egypt was so persistent through the whole of antiquity that it cannot be spurious. According to the geographer Strabo (about 64 B.C.-A.D.23):

"We saw there the buildings dedicated formerly to the lodging of priests; but this is not all: we were shown also the dwelling of Plato and Eudoxus, for Eudoxus accompanied Plato to this place [Heliopolis], and they established themselves here and both resided there 13 years in the society of the priests: the fact is affirmed by several authors. These priests, so profoundly versed in the knowledge of celestial phenomena, were at the same time mysterious people, seldom communicative, and it was only due to time and adroit management that Eudoxus and Plato were able to be initiated by them into several of their theoretical speculations. But these barbarians retained the best part in their own possession" (*Geogr.* XVII. I.29).

Some may argue that if "these barbarians" were really so lavish as to reveal "the best part" of their wisdom, Plato would have been a Neoplatonist more like Plotinus and Iamblichus than like Socrates, the insatiable seeker of quarrel. The Socratic attitude, however, may be regarded as an external veil (in accordance to the ancient traditions of "ritual quarrel" and dramatic performances of tricksters which conceal the inner layers of esoteric wisdom). Therefore it is not clear to what extent Plato is either "Egyptian", or "Neoplatonic", though one should remember that Platonism cannot be viewed as entirely "ahistorical." The different historical contexts dictate different rules of the game and reflect different kinds of mentalities, while the underlying metaphysical principles remain the same.

The undeserved philosophical hero of all modern histories, whose reputation of the "first philosopher" is largely based on rather distorted or misinterpreted records of Aristotle, is Thales of Miletus, also credited with visiting the priests and astronomers of Egypt. He learned geometry from the Egyptians, according to Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosop.*43-24). Before approaching Thales and his controversial teachings, as they are attested to by later and not always credible writers, we should discuss the particular theological perspective which started the "disenchantment of the world" by rejecting sacramental symbolism (labelled as "idolatry"), theurgy and traditional mythological imagery.

In the 18th Dynasty (1550-1295 B.C.) of the New Kingdom in Egypt, two "antipolytheistic", or rather monistically oriented, but essentially different movements appeared: (1) the so-called New Solar theology which was attested before Amenophis IV and continued after his fall into the Late Period, and (2) the Amarna theology of Amenophis IV (Akhenaton) who ruled 1352-1338 B.C.

The solar monotheism, suddenly introduced by Akhenaten, the heretic pharaoh, restructured the world and reduced it to a restricted human point of view. In traditional Egyptian imagery both macrocosm and microcosm were regarded from the divine point of view: the observing human eye was almost excluded and the magnificent sacred spectacles of the cosmic state along with its permanent archetypes and unending dynamic processes were viewed not from below, but from above and from within. The reality was depicted as the sum (diversity in unity) of divine actions which constitute metaphysical constellations at different levels of being. Not the visible phenomena (separated from the sacred prototypes), but their inner meaning was the main concern of the Egyptian priests. Their texts describe certain imaginal and noetic topographies which no average human observer has ever seen here below, because "it is not just the visible, but the intelligible world that counts as reality".[44]

During the short revolutionary period introduced by Akhenaten everything was turned upside down. The multi-dimensional theophany (the pantheon of *neteru)* and mythical imagery which emphasized transcendence were replaced by visible reality. At the same time metaphysical concepts of hidden meaning and the archetypal picture of divine semiotics were replaced by physical concepts of function and causality. Akhenaten's monotheism, centred on the optics of Aten, the visible solar body, eliminated the metaphysical notion of the "first time" (*tep sepi*), crucial for theurgic rites, temple liturgies, and mystical ascent. The Egyptian concept of *tep sepi*, to which corresponds the later Hebrew *be-re-shit*, "in the beginning", means the principal beginning, the emergence of the divine Intellect, Atum-Ra, along with *kosmos noetos*, and this beginning transcends the sensible realm, being "everywhere and nowhere". As the eternal presence it constitutes the vertical henadic axis of return to the source and liberation.

Instead, Akhenaten's world-view is based on the sensual apprehension of time. Spatial visibility is regarded as the dimension of physical light. When the eternal presence (usually touched through the hieratic rites and intellection) is replaced by past and future, then cosmogony becomes embryology and God himself begins to be equated with time which unfolds everything. This is the exact inversion of traditional Egyptian doctrines.

In the new established monotheism, God is revealed to the physical eye as the visible sun disk, but hidden from the heart, except the heart of Akhenaten, who becomes the sole intermediary between his Aten and disenchanted reality here below. Contrary to this innovation, the theology of the New Kingdom emphasized the necessity of "taking God into one's heart": the possibility of mystical knowledge is open to every pious man and woman. Although this knowledge is carried in the depths of the heart, God himself is invisible. Therefore seeing God is possible only for those transformed souls who are "dead" both in the literal and the initiatory sense. Only the soul (*ba*) who passed through the Osirian transformations in the Duat and is turned into the luminous spirit (*akh*) can meet the gods face to face and itself become a god.

In Amarna religion, however, although knowledge of God is reserved for the pharaoh only, the ability to see God is granted to everybody. But this God is no longer the transcendent Amun, the hidden God, whose symbols, images, and names are the many gods, but the visible body of the sun, the One as the rational cause of material generation. Claiming that the meaning of the world (or its "scientific truth") is only accessible to the heart of the sole expert, Akhenaten himself (the prototype of the modern scientific experts who promote the same claims), is virtually saying that reality has no mysterious divine meaning at all. Therefore, as J. Assmann pointed out, in the Amarna period explanation (scientific search for causality) replaced interpretation (symbolic hermeneutics):

"The more there is that can be explained, the less there is to interpret. Thus we may perhaps say that, instead of founding a new religion, Akhenaten was the first to find a way out of religion".[45]

Though he did away with Osiris and the ritualized and temple-like Osirian Netherworld (which functioned as an alchemical vessel of transformation), the concept of the immortality of the soul remained intact. However, Akhenaten rejected the traditional pantheon, and destroyed or damaged temples, statues, and images of the Egyptian gods in the name of Aten who is not even a personal God in the theistic sense, but represents Nature. Therefore the visible world is nothing but an endless becoming, a transformation (*kheperu*) of God-Nature himself. The term *kheper* usually means manifestation, coming forth from the hidden dimension, something invisible becoming visible. But in the Amarna texts the meaning of this term is altered, because Akhenaten did away with any idea of invisibility or hiddenness. There is nothing but nature, and this nature ought to be investigated, held in wonder, praised and lived in. In sharp contrast to this monotheistic doctrine, the traditional Egyptian world is not "nature", because it is not natural.[46]

In the Amarna religion, God is not regarded as a jealous lord who requires total loyalty as in the early Biblical tradition which in many respects is the heir and rather indirect prolongation of Akhenaten's monotheism. Though the new theological and physiological perspective, introduced with the utmost compulsion and terror, was experienced by the pharaoh as a religious revelation, it is not, strictly speaking, a theology of will. Instead of pious servanthood, knowledge and truth are emphasized, though they are privileges of the king. The clear-cut distinction between true and false in matters of religion (inseparable from state policies) marked the idea of orthodoxy with its intolerance of any beliefs which deviated from or opposed the single doctrine regarded as unquestionably true.

In the ancient Near Eastern civilizations, all theologies, cosmogonies and their related divine names were translatable. They were not absolute at the level of myth and polysemantic hermeneutics. Therefore not the question of orthodoxy, but that of orthopraxis, the correct performance of sacred rites, based on the distinction between right and wrong in human action was thought to be important. If the Amarna religion had existed for longer, it would surely have produced a corpus of canonical sacred texts. The fall of Akhenaten's rule prevented a shift from rites and "idols" to scriptures, as happened in the later Semitic monotheisms. However, Akhenaten's revolution (though not long-lasting) marks a period which is described by modern scholarship as the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

It is no mere accident that both Homer's epics (which probably belong to the late Assyrian period, 8th century B.C.) and the Biblical Exodus (the mythical and symbolic narration of Moses, who is the Egyptian priest Osarseph in Manetho's account of the departure from Egypt), are traditionally set in the 13th century B.C. After the end of the Egyptian New Kingdom (the XX Dynasty lasted until about 1069 B.C.) and the collapse of political unity, the theology of will and personal piety accelerated in Egypt, officially proclaimed by Herihor. This high priest of Amun pronounced the age of "rebirth" and established a new representative theocracy, based on the oracles of Amun.

However, the unifying idea in this period of ancient history was that of a world-state, programmatically embodied by the neo-Assyrian empire, followed by the neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. In such complicated conditions the Biblical tradition of the Chosen People (the tribal myth of promised success and world dominion) is developed. According to J. Assmann:

"The report of the Exodus stems from an authentic account of a sojourn in and departure from Egypt, but those events were experienced not by the Hebrews but by the Hyksos, whose traditions the Hebrews inherited. Israel elevated these transmissions to the rank of a normative past and made them an integral part of its cultural memory only at a time when the Hebrews as a people needed to draw on this past to master their present. That 'present', however, could not have predated the first appearance of the prophets. Hence, the literary version of the Joseph legend, the Exodus, and all other biblical references to Egypt are derived from Late Period Egypt, not the Egypt of the Bronze Age, in which the version known to us sets the Exodus".[47]

The transformed and reinterpreted legacy of Akhenaten is also partly inherited by the Hebrews who regarded Egypt as a sort of mythological monster and a depository of the hated idolatry. The Egyptians' and

Hebrews' abhorrence of each other was intense and permanent, perhaps due to the legacy of ideas and memories inherited by the Hebrews from the expelled Hyksos and the banished Akhenaten's rebels. Even in the time of the Renaissance, Giordano Bruno, the partisan of the spurious "Egyptian religion", regarded the Jews with contempt.[48]

The religion of the enlightener-iconoclast Akhenaten was a puritanical cult devoid of theurgy and metaphysical symbolism, restricting the knowable universe to the world accessible to the senses. Therefore J. Assmann argues that "as a thinker, Akhenaten stands at the head of a line of inquiry that was taken up seven hundred years later by the Milesian philosophers of nature with their search for the one all-informing principle..."[49]

Of course, this line of inquiry differs considerably from the Biblical theology of the divine will which arranges and plots world history (centred on the moral and political adventures of his chosen tribe) according to the unpredictable intentions, plans, and wishes of Yahweh, the jealous personal God of Israel.

10. Thales and the Egyptian Myths

Being partly of Phoenician background, Thales lived in Miletus from 624 to 545 B.C. Until his middle age, Miletus was a part of the Lydian empire, ruled from the court at Sardes, and Thales himself was a member of this "Oriental" power structure, living with the ruler of Miletus at his court and visiting Egypt, presumably under the royal wardship. His assertions recall many Egyptian texts and his main ideas are no more than the Egyptian mythological and theological motifs released from their initial theological contexts for the purpose of philosophical *paideia* among the less educated Miletians.

Ever since the Enlightenment modern scholars have tried to convince us that mythology does not satisfy the desire to know the causes of things. They suppose that the only positive function of myths and traditional tales is to make us feel at home in the world, as if sacred myths were devoid of any metaphysical content and serve simply as a pleasant intoxicant. However, it is incorrect to maintain that myth is related to the demythologized rationalistic account as opinion (*doxa*) is related to scientific knowledge (*episteme*). To regard "wonder", from which philosophy begins, as ignorance and as the confusion which arises when the mythical world-view is radically questioned, is to fail completely in the understanding of myth and its symbolic and transformative power. The variety of world-representations found in different religious-mythological traditions are providential veils, not arbitrary fictions which would compel poor Thales to reject all of them in the name of one single "physiological" world-picture, naively held to be the only one which was both true and adequate. The many different world-representations cannot prevent the apprehension (through direct intellectual intuition or contemplation of symbols) of the invisible realm beyond all representations.

To say that Thales moves "beyond representations to the underlying, intelligible reality",[50] amounts to saying that the creators of mythological world pictures were extremely ignorant and unable to comprehend pure noetic reality which transcends all words and images. However, the symbolism of ancient hieratic myths and rituals shows this opinion to be both shaky and ungrounded. If Thales really tried to strip away the stage and see the playwright, he was doing such deconstruction either in search of the transcendent ruling principle (say, Amun or Zeus), or for desacralized and impersonal "nature", as it is understood by the moderns. Since the trivial concept of "nature" (and the related "ontology of death", to use the term coined by Hans Jonas, for if matter is the primary reality then life itself could only be a "disease of matter"[51]) is rather a recent invention, it seems that Thales ultimately regarded reality as theophany, the fabric of the ordered and beautiful cosmic unity, that is, the magnificent divine mask through which shines the essential light of first principles, namely, the gods.

According to Thales, "the world is the most beautiful (*kalliston kosmos*), for it is God's making (*poiema gar theou*). Something intangible that permeates all things is operating within or through the visible cosmos, and this principle cannot be reduced to a simple material substratum. Hence, a plenitude of gods (*theoi*) is hidden behind the cosmic veils. But in this respect Thales says nothing new, nothing that had not been already and better said by the Egyptians and other ancient nations a long time before. The world is a living being, a divine body (like a statue) in need of the animating principle, the soul and the spirit which appear as the descending and ascending life-giving forces. According to Aristotle:

"And some say that it (soul) is intermingled in the universe, for which reason, perhaps, Thales also thought that all things are full of gods" (*panta plere theon einai: De anima* 411a7).

This doctrine is the same as the Egyptian one: the gods (*neteru*), who bring life (*ankh*) and animate all bodies, are manifestations (*kheperu)* of the supreme transcendent Principle and constitute the different levels of reality. For Greeks, the gods (*theoi*) are ever-living and everlasting principles. Though supporting evidence is insufficient, W. K. C. Guthrie boldly asserts that Thales "rejected the anthropomorphic deities of popular religion" while retaining its language to the extent of saying that the whole world is filled with gods.[52] It is a commonly held modern mistake to assume that the ancient Hellenes really worshipped the "anthropomorphic gods" conceived in the image of human beings. As J. P. Vernant clearly demonstrated, rather the opposite is true:

"In all its active aspects, in all the compounds of its physical and psychological dynamism, the human body reflects the divine models as the inexhaustible source of a vital energy when, for an instant, the brilliance of divinity happens to fall on a mortal creature, illuminating him, as in a fleeting glow, with a little of that splendor that always clothes the body of a god".[53]

To think that Hesiodic genealogies or Homeric accounts were accepted at face value by the Hellenes, even by the initiates and the educated minority, would be to indulge oneself in rationalistic naiveté instead of trying to explore the metaphysical exegesis and symbolism of the sacred. Despite the supposed shift of traditional thought, inaugurated by Thales, it is evident that the gods retained their force. Perhaps his interpretation of unity and nature (if one is ready to believe poor testimonies) in certain respects followed Akhenaten's line of inquiry, but it is difficult to accept, as W. K. C. Guthrie argues, that "at the conscious level, he (Thales) had made a deliberate break with mythology and was seeking a rational account".[54]

Due to this "deliberate break" Thales is regarded as the "first philosopher" in the contemporary Western sense, though, unlike the modern "research fellow", the genuine ancient philosopher is a noetically enlightened person who follows his lived *philosophia* as a model way of living and dying, or of becoming "like a god". For him there is not any sharp division between the inspired sacred myth (which requires an esoteric interpretation) and logical accounts or discursive reasonings (*logos*), between *sophia* (revealed or inherited wisdom) and *theoria* (contemplation), or between philosophy as a commentary on certain privileged canonical texts and philosophy as an individual dialectical inquiry.

However, most contemporary Western scholars, shaped by the reality-distorting and tendentious modern *paideia*, insist that Thales wished to speak according to reason (*logos*), and his choice of reason over imagination marks the turning point in the history of thought. Such a point of view itself constitutes a "mythology" of sorts.

When Aristotle mentioned Thales, "the founder of this type of philosophy" (*alla Thales men ho tes toiautes archegos philosophias: Metaph.*983b6), arguing that water is the original source of all things, he actually means not of all philosophy, but only of "this type" and does not say that Thales' principle (*arche*) or natural substance, namely water, is some material fluid brought from the neighbouring lake. This water may equally be understood as the ineffable primordial "water" (symbol of the One) which transcends even the noetic realm of Intellect. G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven have already raised a doubt regarding the Aristotelian interpretation:

"Are we justified in inferring from the Peripatetic identification of Thales' water as 'material principle' that he believed the visible, developed world to be water in some way? This is the normal interpretation of Thales; but it is important to realize that it rests ultimately on the Aristotelian formulation, and that Aristotle, knowing little about Thales, and that indirectly, would surely have found the mere information that the world originated from water sufficient justification for saying that water was Thales' material principle or *arche*, with the implication that water is a persistent substrate".[55]

It is more likely that Thales had in mind the Egyptian Nun, trying to translate the ancient metaphysics into the slightly different, but no less "mythical" language of the universal and divine *phusis* which is not necessarily a material substrate. According to F. Schuon, "when Thales saw in 'water' the origin of all things, it is as certain as can be that Universal Substance - the Prakriti of the Hindus – is in question and not the sensible element".[56] But if Thales himself was partly neglected and misunderstood by subsequent generations, can one boldly assert (as the contemporary scholar does) the following statement:

"With Thales we are encountering, possibly for the first time in Western thought, a theology divested of provincial beliefs and poetic fabrications. Thales does not speak of the cultic god of the Milesians among whom he lived, the pantheon of the Egyptians whom he visited, or the splendid fictions of Hesiod which he had very likely heard at celebrations".[57]

Putting aside the disturbing question in what sense Thales is a representative of "Western" thought, or to what extent modern Westerners (moulded by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and by Romanticism) have an exclusive right to the inheritance of ancient Mediterranean traditions, it is not necessary to speak of the Egyptian pantheon (*psdt:* Ennead, the gods) in order to follow one or another line of an esoteric exegesis, reading the meaning beyond the iconographical structure of images and symbols. The only danger is to misunderstand the essence of cosmogonical myth and to view the "ineffable" (the first Principle) as the "natural" (the substantial ground of all material manifestation) and thus to "mythologize" in a crude and opaque "scientific" manner.

The concept of the primordial Waters (Nun as the ineffable God, the Neoplatonic One) reflects the Egyptian cosmogonical picture of the noetic universe as a sphere of the divine light or the life-giving air (which stands for the spirit of Shu). Nun, or Nu, may also mean "inert" in the sense of a certain unspeakable condition existing before the manifestation of Being represented as the rising of the noetic Sun (Atum-Ra), i.e., before an appearance (*kheper*) of the archetypal pleroma and all subsequent irradiations. The hidden, dark, and inert state of the ultimate divine transcendence is described in the *Coffin Texts*:

"I am the Waters (*nw*)
I am inert" (*njnj: CT* V.312)
"I am a baby (*nw*) of his mother.
I am a child, son of Hathor.
I am an inert one (*njnj*) in the Waters" (*nw: CT* IV.182)

In the ordered universe, understood as theophany and the interplay of different divine forces, Waters are represented by the Osirian Netherworld, Duat, and the Nile: the psychic "waters" flow through the Duat inside the goddess Nut's body (her name, *nwt*, being a feminine adjective meaning "of the Waters") and the Sun god Ra (equivalent to *Nous*) is pictured travelling on them at night.

Since Thales studied philosophy in Egypt, his doctrines surely reflected the Egyptian prototypes. According to the Hellenic tradition:

"Thales came to Miletus an old man having spent a long time studying philosophy in Egypt" (Aetius 1.3.1).

"They (Egyptians) say that the sun and moon do not use chariots, but boats in which to sail round in their courses; and by this they intimate that the nourishment and origin of these heavenly bodies is from moisture. They think also that Homer, like Thales, had gained his knowledge from the Egyptians, when he postulated water as the source and origin of all things (*hudor archen hapanton kai genesin tithesthai*); for, according to them, Oceanus is Osiris, and Tethys is Isis, since she is the kindly nurse and provider for all things. In fact, the Greeks call emission *apousia* and coition *sunousia*, and the son (*huios*) from water (*hudor*) and rain (*husai*); Dionysus also they call Hues since he is lord of the nature of moisture; and he is no other than Osiris.

"... They call him up out of the water by the sound of trumpets, at the same time casting into the depths a lamb as an offering to the Keeper of the Gate. The trumpets they conceal in Bacchic wands, as Socrates has stated in his treatise on *The Holy Ones*. Furthermore, the tales regarding the Titans and rites celebrated by night agree with the accounts of the dismemberment of Osiris and his revivification and regenesis (*tais anabiosesi kai palingenesiais*)...

"Not only the Nile, but every form of moisture they call simply the effusion of Osiris; and in their holy rites the water jar in honour of the god heads the procession. And by the picture of a rush they represent a king and the southern region of the world, and the rush is interpreted to mean the watering and fructifying of all things, and in its nature it seems to bear some resemblance to the generative member" (*De Iside et Osiride* 34-36).

The Hellenic philosophers, starting with Plato and Aristotle, constantly refer to the Iliad of Homer where Ocean is called the father of Gods (*Il.* XIV.201) and the source of all beings (*Okeanou hos per genesis, pantesi tetuknai*: ibid. XIV.246). Julian even equated Helios, the father of the seasons (who, being "the genuine son of the Good", "is One and proceeds from one God, even from the noetic cosmos which is itself One": *Or.* IV, p.386), with Oceanus, "the lord of two-fold substance", saying as follows:

"My meaning here is not obscure, is it, seeing that before my time Homer said the same things? 'Oceanus who is the father of all things': yes, for mortals and for the blessed gods too, as he himself would say; and what he says is true. For there is no single thing in the whole of existence that is not the offspring of the substance of Oceanus (*tes Okenou pephuken ousias ekgonon: Or.* IV. pp.404-405 Wright).

It seems, as Julian himself suggests, that such doctrines (or their proper interpretations) are kept in silence, because ultimately they have been "taught by the gods or mighty daimons" to "the priests of the mysteries" (ibid.).

Perhaps the only difference between Homer and Thales is that while Thales, like other so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers, regarded his own dogmatic assertions about the ultimate nature of the universe as an accurate (but no less "mythical") account approved by reason (though even in this respect we cannot be sure), Homer (or several singers who partly followed examples of the Akkadian and Ugaritic epic traditions) playfully presented the same teaching using poetical and mythological images. Therefore Ch. Evangeliou rightly remarks that "Homer's poetry would have the advantage over the dryness of philosophic prose".[58] And the Egyptian myths, used in the sacred rites, would have a clear advantage over Homeric "literature" which provoked such a turmoil in the minds of those purists and "enlighteners" who were unable either to understand the logic of a sacred myth, or to delight in epic poetry, i.e., to enjoy its conventional and heroic aesthetics.

11. Water as Metaphysical Principle and Divine Substance

Aristotle's attempt to explain why Thales chose *hudros* (water) as the first principle (*Metaph.*983b ff) is incorrect, because this principle is not regarded by Thales in the manner of Aristotelian prime matter, but represents a certain permeating and ineffable identity that unites all instances of theophany. This is the permanent essence of divinity along with the Spirit, or Life, that is diffused through all created or manifested things. It is more likely that Thales is not a materialist who stands at the beginning of natural philosophy (as Aristotle and his ancient and modern followers understand it), but may be regarded as a metaphysician who used symbolic language to show that divine Life, as a genuine creative force, is diffused through the ordered cosmos which is ensouled and "full of gods". In fact, this perspective is close to the Egyptian doctrine of

Water, Life, and Order, already attested in the *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 B.C.):

"O you Eight Infinite Ones – an infinite number of Infinite Ones (*heh en heh*),
Who encircle the Sky with your arms,
Who draw together the Sky and Horizon of Geb.
Shu has given you birth out of the Flood, out of the Waters,
Out of *tenemu*, out of the Darkness,
That he might allot you to Geb and Nut,
While Shu is Eternal Recurrence (*neheh*) and Tefnut is Eternal
Sameness (*djet*).
I am the *ba* of Shu who is at the Great Flood,
Who goes up to the sky as he wishes,
Who goes down to the earth as his heart decides.
Come in excitement to greet the god in me.
I am Shu, child of Atum.
My clothing is the air of life" (*CT* 80.1-13)

"Then said Atum: My living daughter is Tefnut.
She will exist with her brother Shu.
Life (*ankh*) is his identity,
Order (*maat*) is her identity,
I shall live with my twins, my fledglings,
With me in their midst –
One of them at my back,
One of them in my belly…
It is my son who shall live,
He whom I begot in my identity,
For he has learned how to enliven the one in the egg, in the respective
womb,
As mankind, that emerged from my Eye –
[the Eye] that I sent forth when I
was alone with the Waters, in inertness,
Not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,
Before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist;
Before the Lotus has been tied together, on which I could sit"
(*CT* 80.30-50)

"I am Life (*ankh*), for whom the length of the Sky
and the breath of Geb were made:
It is from me that presented offerings emerge for the god"
(*CT* 80.91-92 Allen).

Shu, identified as the noetic Life (Atum's Light and Spirit), is the son of Atum who emerges from the Waters (Nun), or the Flood (*hehu*). Hence, Atum, Shu, and Tefnut constitute the first intelligible triad. The Life is diffused at different ontological levels of reality: Shu lives in the transcendent realm of Atum, but when sent down "to the Isle of Fires", his identity becomes Osiris, son of Geb. Finally, he reaches the material world and his function here is to "make firm his flesh every day", to enliven all creatures through his mouth, putting life in their nostrils: falcons, jackals, pigs, crocodiles, fish and "the crawling things on Geb's back". The initiate (the "dead" person, *ba* separated from *khat*) identifies himself with Shu in his animating and life-giving aspect. Shu's sister Tefnut stands for the archetypal intelligence, order, truth, and justice, the right measure for the Life's emanation.

As the above quoted texts clearly show, the archetypal Ogdoad (constituted by the eight proto-noetic and ineffable principles) is already contained "without place" in the potentiality of the hidden Monad. And since Atum (*j.tmw*) is a form of the verb *tem* (*tm*), meaning both "not be" and "complete, finish", Atum means both "non-being" (which transcends being as the Beyond-Being, Nun-Atum) and "plenitude of noetic being", the overwhelming fullness, *pleroma* of divine lights and intellects (Atum-Ra). He emerges from the depths of Nun as the primordial Lotus, the Holy City of Ra (Heliopolis), i.e., as the supreme intelligible principle (the Parmenidian and Neoplatonic One-Many) which "gave birth to Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis, when he was one and developed into three" (*CT* 80.75-76).

In the light of Egyptian theological accounts, it seems that Thales, far from being a materialist reductionist, posited Water as the first principle from which stems the increasing multiplicity of the gods whose invisible presence sustains the measured arrangement of visible things under the aegis of unity. Thus the Water produces living Forms, and this Water, far from being lifeless "matter", is the unspeakable *theos*, the Father of the gods who transcends all Forms and all noetic Lights, and is therefore symbolized by the dark and inert Water.

The ineffable principle of manifestation, or the living divine substance, having its immanent aspect and called *hudros* by Thales, is surely not a "material" cause. Likewise the ancient Egyptian theologies, while using material symbols for the immaterial realities, discuss not a "material" causality (as some contemporary scholars maintain) when they speak about the Waters, the Primeval Mound, Heliopolis, the First Sunrise, Atum and his archetypal Ennead which developed from the initial Monad. Instead, their sophisticated and paradoxical accounts, using carefully selected symbols and images, conceptualize the ultimate Cause of all creation which lies outside creation and is "hidden from the gods", since "no god knows His (i.e., Amun's who is hidden in the depths of Nun) true appearance". Hence, "water" is an adequate symbol for the supreme One, the transcendent and infinite source of Being, envisaged as a swampy mire which contains the eight initial proto-noetic paradigms of the intelligible cosmos (*kosmos noetos* of the later Platonic tradition).

Aristotle was very hasty and without scruples in his attempt to reduce the "divine substances" of the early Hellenic theologians into the low status of mere material causes, though these "substances" are metaphysical symbols which stand for the supreme gods and the initial principles, both transcendent and immanent. When this unjust and intended misinterpretation is accomplished, the theologians (including Thales), labelled as the "Pre-socratics" by modern rationalists (who are lovers of historical fictions and rigid classifications), are criticized as incapable of making the correct use of these "material causes" which they have proclaimed as the material substratum and the ultimate source of reality. Therefore one should agree with the assertion made by R. K. Hack:

"If we bear in mind that the so-called physical doctrines of the Ionian philosophers were really to a great extent metaphysical – that is to say, these Greek philosophers believed that they were investigating, and had discovered, the nature of ultimate divine reality, and not of mere outer appearances – we shall be able to understand why the Ionians named one substance after another as the divine source of the universe".[59]

R. K. Hack argues that when Thales proclaimed Water as the living and divine substance of the universe (we should add: the manifestation of Shu, the son of Atum, who himself stems from the Waters in more sophisticated Egyptian accounts), his main novelty lies in identifying the supreme divine power with the cosmogenetic divine substance, while introducing a non-anthropomorphic divinity.[60] This assertion cannot be accepted without reservations and is not correct, if viewed not against the traditional Hellenic "literature" – the poetic accounts of the Olympian gods – but in the light of Egyptian theology and metaphysics which cannot be accused of a lush anthropomorphism at all.

It operated with a strictly coherent system of symbolism open to several meanings at different levels of interpretation. The ambivalent Egyptian symbolism cannot be properly understood without considering all aspects of the divine iconography. This includes visible forms and the entire field of semantic associations. Also the countless puns and their magic function must always be taken into consideration. To see here something like the sadly famous "anthropomorphism" of the Hellenic epics (which are inspired poetry, anyway) is to be surprisingly naïve and contemptuous of the ancient myths and all symbolic modes of thought.

12. Metaphysical Meaning of Ancient Mythologies

The new wave of metaphysical, cosmological, and physiological inquiry which started in the 6th century B.C. among philosophers and sophists (at first there was no real difference between them) strengthened the intriguing opinion that the myths and hieratic accounts were unable to deal with reality without introducing certain fatal distortions and deformations. Being unable to understand the deeper symbolic meaning of ancient mythologies or to put the acquired fragments of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom into an integral and meaningful unity, they turned against their own lavish poetic tradition (also regarded at its face value) and argued for the need of a pure "scientific" theology and for a genuine worship of the invisible principles based on a proper comprehension of the divine order.

So it seems that "irrational" and often scandalous myths must be neglected in favour of the "semi-esoteric" *logos* which belongs to a few specialists in scientific knowledge. However, it may be that, as the remark made by Socrates at the end of Plato's *Theaetetus* suggests, knowledge as a rational account (*logos*) is also unattainable. Socrates says to *Theaetetus*, the young pupil of the distinguished mathematician Theodorus:

"So, Theaetetus, neither perception, nor true belief, nor the addition of an 'account' to true belief can be knowledge" (*Theaet.*210b).

But, as a consequence of dialectical scrutiny, even if Theaetetus remains barren, he cannot any more fancy he knows what he does not know:

"For that, and no more, is all that my art can effect; nor have I any of that knowledge possessed by all the great and admirable men of our own day or of the past. But this midwife's art is a gift from heaven; my mother had it for women, and I for young men of a generous spirit and for all in whom beauty dwells" (ibid., 210c).

Though Rosemary Desjardin argues that Theaetetus' amazement is philosophical wonder "because such reflection opens him up to the philosophical issues" in searching for a solution to problems of irrationality (the incompatibility of incommensurables),[61] one may suspect that this "feeling of wonder" (*to thaumazein*) which shows "that you are a philosopher" (*Theaet.*155d), is really a wonder induced by facing the mystery of the divine intelligence and the ineffable Waters.

Accordingly, "true knowledge" is not a property of human beings as mortals, be they scientists or rationalists, and cannot be acquired by discursive thought, because it concerns the intelligible realm and objects of the divine order which can only be grasped by the transformed soul through noetic insight and epoptic vision akin to revelation or mystical union with the divine.

Contrary to the ancient traditions of wisdom, many contemporary thinkers in their unending quest for certainty turn not to the sacred myths, revelations, and symbols which lead to integral piety, illumination, and inner vision, but to trivialized mathematics and epistemology which cannot transcend the realm of discursive reasoning and secular pragmatism. Therefore the main area of philosophy (by this term meaning an academic discourse) is that of epistemology: the pursuit of *scientia* (instead of *sapientia*) "turned out to be a major pastime for the modern philosophers" who "regard Plato's *Theaetetus* (perhaps along with the *Meno* and Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*), as containing the primal sacred doctrines (*dissoi logoi*) revered by the devotees of modern epistemology".[62] This rather ironical remark made by Daryl L. Hale is aimed at the endemic failure of contemporary thinkers to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. They take their only task to be that of elucidating the conditions of human knowledge, classifying countless opinions and instigating sceptical attacks on those who disagree with their premises based on barren secular rationalism and humanism.

Seeing from this special standpoint, the earliest Greek philosophers (starting with Thales) divorced philosophy from mythology, poetry, and traditional genealogies. Since "reason sought and found truth that was universal", the earlier age of "mythology and superstition" was replaced by the age of science, according to F. M. Cornford.[63] This discovery of Nature is accompanied by the tacit denial of the distinction between experience and revelation:

"The conception of Nature is extended to incorporate what had been the domain of the supernatural. The supernatural, as fashioned by mythology, simply disappears; and all that really exists is natural." [64]

At present we are not so sure about such straightforward conclusions. And even if the essence of Ionian philosophy and science (which is credited with denying the spiritual, as distinct from the material) is not misconceived and misunderstood, i.e., if Thales really introduced something new – the so-called "Western science" as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – nevertheless, this idea of the crucial turning-point is fabricated and maintained with some infantile enthusiasm and magic hyperbolism.

According to Rene Guenon, in the 6th century B.C., commonly viewed as the starting point of "classical" civilization, something of which there had been no previous example appeared: that special form of thought which acquired and retained the name of "philosophy".[65] R. Guenon recognizes that this word can be regarded in a quite legitimate sense, because it is simply an initial disposition required for the attainment of wisdom. Only the perversions which substitute "philosophy" for "wisdom", taking the transitional stage for the end itself and introducing a "pretended wisdom" which is purely human and entirely of the rational order, should be neglected.[66]

However, R. Guenon follows too closely the assumptions of those whom he is ready to criticize, thus assuming that *philosophia* really begins with Thales. It is more likely that Thales simply readapted and reinterpreted (perhaps, in a one-sided fashion) some aspects of the Egyptian *mere rekhu* (*mre rhw*), the "love of knowledge", "striving for wisdom", i.e., "philosophy" in its etymological and anagogic sense whose archetypal guide and divine patron was Thoth (*dhwty:* Djehuty). This divine scribe and demiurgic *Logos*, the heart and tongue of Ra, himself represents and embodies the beginning, the middle, and the end of the way towards the noetic identity of *ba* (the winged soul), since every wise man ultimately is united with Thoth and his energies.

The Neopythagoreans and Middle Platonists inherited and accepted the tradition which presented Plato as a disciple of Hermes Trismegistus – that means not as a historical person but as an archetype which stands for all wisdom preserved and practised in the Thothian Houses of Life. So, if certain Platonic doctrines are the same as those of Hermes, it is obviously because Plato had copied Hermes, not the other way round. As Zosimus of Panopolis asserted in his alchemical work *On apparatus and furnaces*, the Egyptian priest Bitys (or Bitos), the thrice-great (*trismegas*) Plato and the infinitely great (*meriomegas*) Hermes are the authors of the mysterious tablet (*pinax*) which views Thouthos (Thoth) as "the first man, the interpreter of all that exists and the giver of names to all corporeal beings".[67]

It follows that Bitys, Hermes and Plato stand on the same spiritual level, represent the same tradition, and profess the same philosophical and theurgical teachings. Such opinion was firmly maintained by the hellenized Egyptians and late Hellenic philosophers themselves. Hence, according to Proclus, Plato derived some of his doctrines from the Egyptian Hermes, for example, the teaching about matter:

"Orpheus produces matter from the first hypostasis of intelligibles. For there perpetual darkness and the infinite subsist. And these indeed, subsist there in a way more excellent than the successive orders of being. In matter however, the unilluminated and the infinite are inherent, through indigence, and not according to a transcendency, but a deficiency of power. Moreover, the tradition of the Egyptians (*he ton Aiguption paradosis*) asserts the same thing concerning it. For the divine Iamblichus relates that according to Hermes materiality is produced from essentiality (*ek tes ousiotetos ten huloteta paragesthai bouletai*). It is probable therefore, that Plato derived from Hermes an opinion of this kind concerning matter" (*In Tim.* I.386 Taylor).

Since philosophy is a pursuit of *ba*, inseparable from its destiny, namely, descent and ascent, manifestation and reintegration (through the *paideia* of cosmic life: embodiment and disembodiment), Proclus in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (III.298.27-29/330) discusses three *ochemata*, or vehicles, of the soul: (1) the first *ochema* which is natural to the soul and puts it inside the manifested reality; (2) the second one which makes the soul a citizen of the world of becoming; (3) the third one that is like a shell and makes the soul an inhabitant of the material world.

This division is analogous to the hierarchy of *akh*, *ba* (in a narrow sense of the soul separated from the mortal body, *khat*), and *ka* of the Egyptians. In the ontological hierarchy of being and the related esoteric path of ascent, *ka* represents the source of a person's vital energy connected with the ancestral spirits and the pharaoh whose *ka*, as the vital power of Horus, permeates the whole country and is felt as a presence in every heart. The concept of *ba* goes beyond the level of life energy, fertility, and well-being. *Ba* (the after-death consciousness, also revealed for the initiates) is the "soul" (or manifestation) moving between Earth and Heaven, though its real home is the intelligible realm, *kosmos noetos*. According to the Old Kingdom sage Ptahotep: "The wise feed their *ba* with what endures".[68] As the vehicle of ascent, it is depicted as the human-headed falcon or the jabiru bird.

The awakening of *ba* is a consequence of becoming aware of the physical body as a corpse. It means the soul must be "philosophically" (through initiation, contemplation, and death) separated from the body. When the ascending *ba* "comes to the places it knows, it does not miss its former path".[69] The realm through which *ba* moves belongs to Osiris (it is the intermediate *mundus imaginalis*, Duat, the body of Nut-Hathor, or the World Soul), while the realm of *akh* is that of Ra. Therefore *akh* means intelligence, spiritual light, "the shining one", represented by the crested ibis, the symbol of Thoth. The references to the *akh* are associated with the soul's homecoming, return to the divine source, the end of philosophical ascent, i.e., reaching the intelligible realm, *huperouranios topos* of Plato's *Phaedrus*. When *ba* is transformed and its ascent is accomplished, it becomes an imperishable and immortal *akh*, a "shining spirit", a star irradiating intelligible light, a son of Ra. Thus the *akh* is the *ba* divinized, realizing the ultimate precept of self-knowledge: to become like a god.

If we compare this teaching with certain passages of Plato's *Phaedrus*, we should see that (1) *akh* (or the related body of light, *sah*) corresponds to *ochema* for the soul outside the cycles of material existence, (2) *ba* – to the winged soul when it is involved in a series of descents and ascents, (3) *ka* – with the vegetative or nutritive soul which is needed when the higher soul is actually embodied and which serves as an intermediary between the immortal immaterial soul and the material mortal body.

The upper vehicle is usually called *augoeides* by the Neoplatonists and clearly relates the substance this term describes to light, though at the same time distinguishes it from light as such. Most of the Neoplatonists regarded light as closest to the immaterial and purely noetic entities. In the *De anima* commentary, attributed to Simplicius, we have only one soul vehicle as a single substance described by three terms: *aitherodes* (aether-like), *augoeides* (light-like), and *pneumatikos* (being made of *pneuma*).[70]

The Alexandrian Neoplatonist Hermeias used the term *augoeides* to describe not the soul, but the upper Heavens (*huperouranios topos*) to which the divinely led procession of the *Phaedrus* myth aspires (*In Phaedr.*144.26-28). This is the realm of *akhu* described as being like light. The procession led by the royal boat of Ra is analogous to that depicted in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

It seems as if the early Hellenic philosophers (or rather "physiologists") who encountered traditional Egyptian thought were somehow unhappy with its symbols and images when they started to search for an unconditioned unifying ground of reality. However, this unifying ground cannot be simply reduced to "nature" understood in the banal modern sense. Being the cause of Intellect, the first Principle transcends the noetic realm of Ra, therefore it is unknown even to the gods and *akhu*. It is "nowhere", though figuratively described by such names as Waters (*nw*), Flood (*hhw*), Darkness (*kkw*), and Chaos (*tnmw*). This Flood is tantamount to the ineffable "substance" of the universe that enveloped the primordial Monad, along with Shu, "the begetter to repeated millions, out of the Flood, out of the Waters" (*CT* 76.33-34). Therefore Atum, in the depths of the Flood prefigured as Nun-Atum, may proclaim as follows:

> "I am the Waters, unique, without second.
> That is where I developed (*hpr.n.j.jm*)…
> So, the Flood is subtracted from me:
> See, I am the remainder…
> I am the one who made me" (*CT* 714).

13. Pythagorean Numbers and their Paradigms

P. A. Kwasniewski regards the disciples of Pythagoras as "bringing to completion the programme adumbrated in Thales and developed by the *phusiologoi* after him",[71] though this "programme", far from being simply a physiological pursuit, is the creative adaptation and prolongation of Egyptian theological ideas of divine unity, order and harmony. According to Iamblichus, that "truly godlike (*ho theios alethos*) man, who ranks next to Pythagoras and Plato" (Julian *Ep.*2), Pythagoras, after going to Pherecydes and Anaximander, visited Thales of Miletus who

"laying stress on his advanced age and the infirmities of his body, advised him to go to Egypt, to get in touch with the priests of Memphis and Zeus (i.e., Ammun). Thales confessed that the instruction of these priests was the source of his own reputation for wisdom… Thales insisted that, in view of all this, if Pythagoras should study with those priests, he was certain of becoming the wisest and most divine of men" (*Vita Pyth.*2).[72]

Iamblichus tells us that Pythagoras spent many years in the Egyptian sanctuaries of temples, studying astronomy and geometry, and being initiated in all the mysteries of the gods. Later Pythagoras introduced the symbolical method of teaching, in a manner similar to that in which he had been instructed in Egypt.

The Pythagorean excessive concern with numbers (claiming that all is number at the level of principles) reflects their seeking for the ultimate source and eidetic structure of material forms through mathematical theology. By revealing a formal structure underlying all outward appearances, a hidden unity behind multiplicity, they turned towards the archetypes (*paradeigmata*) which transcend material things and function as intelligible and animating principles. The Syrian Neoplatonist Iamblichus, who in his doctrines followed "true philosophical tradition" that included not only Pythagoras, Plato and to certain extent Aristotle, but also Orpheus, Egyptians, and Chaldeans, introduced the Pythagorean *paideia* in his philosophical school (probably in Apamea by the 290's A.D.). He sometimes identified the gods with *arithmoi* (numbers) arguing that arithmology, which is inseparable both from contemplation and hieratic ritual, serves the purification of the soul. Arguing that for Iamblichus the gods themselves were the administrators of theurgic rites, Gregory Shaw says:

"From the monad through the decad numbers were deities, each revealing specific characteristics and functions in manifestation. Since theurgy ritually imitated the laws of cosmogony, it necessarily imitated the laws of arithmogony… Thus to account for the differences in theurgy while retaining its universal transcendent effects as unification, the Pythagorean notion of distribution referred to in Plato's *Gorgias* may be suggestive. Socrates mentions the 'great power of geometric equality amongst gods and men': that to each there was an appropriate measure, and that this proportionality was the law of justice and friendship, which gave order to the world and made it a 'cosmos' (508bc). Applied to theurgic experiences, this principle retains the transcendent sameness of the rites while taking into account their contextual difference. We may, then, speak of geometrically equivalent theurgies, bestowing proportionately the same degree of unification in each ritual. Such unifications could be represented arithmetically, using quantitative 'differences' to represent the degrees of involvement in multiplicity, while following a law of proportionate 'sameness' and thus preserving a geometric equality".[73]

In certain respects, the Pythagorean numbers and figures are the species of things: if not the Forms and the gods themselves, then their manifestations and symbols at the level of mathematical reality. As the first principles and their constructive irradiations, they are *neteru* and *bau* of the Egyptians. The word *neter* (*ntr*), feminine *neteret* (*ntrt*), plural *neteru* and *neterut* respectively, is often pictured by the sign of "staff wrapped with cloth", or "cult flag", perhaps originally related to (1) the practice of embalming (the process of becoming like a god), (2) the wrappings of a mummy which itself represents an ideal *sah* body turned into divine *eidos*, and (3) the idea of unity. The *neteru* are the causes of phenomena and preside over their forms, qualities and the modes which are revealed by number. Hieroglyphic writing used *rekhet* for "number". In this sense, number is the paradigm of the universe examplified by the mystery of the One becoming Two and Three, thus constituting Unity in Trinity as Atum-Shu-Tefnut or Amun-Ra-Ptah.

The mathematical principle permits the derivation of forms of inequality from equality thus illustrating the divine process of manifestation from and return to the source. The paradigmatic relation between the arranged cosmos and numbers makes certain that what is true of numbers and their properties is also true of the structure of the cosmos. According to the Pythagorean tradition, initially based on the Egyptian hieratic teachings and sciences practised in the temples, the virtuous life consists in organizing the irrational, sensible, material by the rational, intelligible, immaterial thus producing perfect order. D. J. O'Meara summarizes the discussion on the formal properties of numbers, the Platonic Forms (the models of universe), and philosophical life, launched by Nicomachus of Gerasa, as follows:

"This ethical cosmology echoes in the soul that achieved by the divine demiurge in the universe. Not only do numbers then hold the keys to understanding the organization of the world; they also contain principles which constitute standards for the ethical life".[74]

Pythagorean and Platonic mathematics deal with realities that are intermediary between (1) immaterial and indivisible intelligibles and (2) material and divisible sensibles (the realm of *khat* which constitutes the visible body of Ptah, or Geb). Thus occupying the intermediate Osirian kingdom, mathematical objects are immaterial and divisible, higher than sensibles and lower than noetic lights, or demiurgic Forms. According to this tripartite ontological structure, the Platonic sciences are divided into (1) dialectic which leads to the noetic realities, (2) mathematics which investigates mathematical objects regarded as dim images of intelligibles, (3) physics that is concerned with sensibles which are images of mathematicals. Therefore what is true in mathematics of the intermediate ontological level in a proper manner reflects what is true in the noetic cosmos; and what is true in mathematics is paradigmatically true in the sensible realm.

It follows that arithmology and geometry are related to discursive thinking (*dianoia*) and imagination (*phantasia*): they are inferior to non-discursive intellectual intuition (*noesis*), because *nous* surpasses *dianoia*, being its source and paradigm. Iamblichus argues that noetic realities are apprehended "by touch" (*kat' epaphen*, perhaps analogous to *dhawq* in Sufism), whereas mathematical science is approached by reasoning (*dia logou*: *De communi mathematica scientia* 33.19-25). However, the syllogistic logic and mathematical method can lead up to non-discursive intuition thus preparing for union with divine Intellect.

For the Neoplatonists, the soul is the generatrix of mathematical forms and ideas. Therefore mathematical forms are projections (*probolai*) of forms previously existing in the soul according to noetic patterns. The divine Intellect (*Nous*) is the ultimate source of knowledge, whereas *dianoia*, human understanding, is located at the same level as mathematical objects and images of *phantasia*. Though geometry (a gift of Hermes-Thoth) is coextensive with all existing things, this middle realm, as Proclus pointed out in his Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's *Elements:*

"contains likeness of all intelligible kinds and paradigms of sensible ones; but the forms of the understanding constitute its essence, and through this middle region it (the science of geometry) ranges upwards and downwards to everything that is or comes to be. Always philosophizing about being in the manner of geometry, it has not only ideas but pictures of all the virtues – intellectual, moral, and physical – and presents in due order all the forms of political constitution, showing from its own nature the variety of the revolutions they undergo. In these areas its activity is immaterial and theoretical, but when it touches on the material world it delivers out of itself a variety of sciences – such as geodesy, mechanics, and optics – by which it benefits the life of mortals" (*In Euclid.* II.62-63).

Therefore *Nous* measures the revolutions of soul as the One measures the life of *Nous* itself, for the One is the measure of all things. When the soul reverts to *Nous,* she is said to move in a circle, according to Proclus, because the first and simplest and most perfect of figures is the circle which corresponds to the Pythagorean Limit (*peras*), the number one and all the things in the column of the better, odd, right, light, good, square and so on (ibid.147.8-19). The main metaphysical concepts are depicted using geometrical imagination and the language of geometry: the circular form is assigned to the Heavens (Nut) and the straight line to the world of generation. Thus, through the geometrical exercises one can move towards the circle and its centre, since the centre (being at rest) is more honourable than any other non-central position, according to the Pythagoreans. The closer to the Intellect (the Sun god Ra moving round in a circle through the body of Nut, or the celestial Nile) the soul attains, the more it dances (*perichoreueian*) around it. Likewise, Intellect dances around the One (Procl. *In Parm.*1072.12). The One is beyond (*epekeina*) all intellective substances, as the intellective principle (or nature, *noera phusis*) is beyond all souls, and the soul's essence (*he psuches ousia*) is beyond all bodies.

Since the soul proceeds from *Nous* (Atum-Ra), she also returns to *Nous* through the intermediate levels of being governed by the Osirian rhythms. Just as Nature stands above her visible figures and shapes, so the Soul projects onto the macrocosmic and microcosmic Imagination, as onto a mirror, the Ideas of the noetic figures, thus offering to the human soul (the down and up moving *ba* which belongs to the Osirian realm of *mundus imaginalis*) an opportunity for transformation and turning inward to the kingdom of intelligible light.

14. Standing on the Solar Barque

Mathematics prepares the soul for the study of intelligibles; therefore Iamblichus provides the following interpretation of the Pythagorean cryptic utterance (*sumbolon*) "Do not cut in two what is on the road":

"Philosophy indeed, it seems, is a road. [The utterance] means then: choose that philosophy and that road to wisdom in which you will not 'cut in two', in which you will propound, not contradictions, but firm and unchanging truths strengthened by scientific demonstrations through sciences (*mathematon*) and contemplation (*theorias*), that is, philosophize in the Pythagorean manner (*Puthagorikos*)... That philosophy which travels through corporeal things and sense-objects, which more recent thinkers immoderately adopt (thinking god and the qualities and soul and the virtues and simply all prime causes in reality are body), is slippery and easily reversible – witness the very different accounts of it – whereas the philosophy which progresses through immaterial eternal intelligible objects that always remain the same and do not admit in themselves of destruction or change, [this philosophy], like its subject-matter, is unerring and firm..." (*Protripticus* 118.7-26).

The aim of this firm and perennial philosophy consists in contemplating the One, the goal of all contemplation, thus being able to see "from here, as if from a watch-tower, God and all in this train of God" (ibid.23.21ff). This train of God is analogous to the train of Ra who moves standing on the solar barque with his "entourage of flame". The gods who are on the prow of the solar barque include Isis, Seth, and Horus, and those on the stern - Hu (creative Word, *Logos*), Sia (Wisdom, Perception), and Ra, or solar Intellect, himself. They are the models of imitation and objects of contemplation for those who approach the solar barque, moving in a circle, i.e., for those who are in a sense "philosophers". The Roman Emperor Flavius Claudius Julianus describes philosophers (including the Egyptians, who "reckon up the names of not a few wise men among themselves", the successors of Hermes, as well as the Chaldeans and Assyrians, the successors of Oannes and Belos, and Hellenes, the successors of Cheiron, the Centaur who taught Achilles and is a prototype of the true spiritual master) as follows:

"The philosophers bid us imitate the gods so far as we can (*mimeisthai keleuousin hemas hoi philosophoi kata dunamin tous theous*), and they teach us that this imitation consists in the contemplation of realities (*en theoria ton onton*). And that this sort of study is remote from passion and is indeed based on freedom from passion, is, I suppose, evident, even without my saying it. In proportion then as we, having been assigned to the contemplation of realities, attain to freedom from passion, in so far do we become like God" (*kata tosouton exomoioumetha to theo: Kata Galilaion logos* I.171 de).

To become like God, for the Egyptian priests, is to become sun-like, to be transformed into *akh* and eventually to be identified with Ra himself. According to the *Book of Two Ways*, produced in the early Middle Kingdom by the XII Dynasty (c.1994-1781 B.C.) priests of the temple of Thoth in Hermopolis, at least 1400 years before Pythagoras, "this is the true mystery of Ra", namely, to arrive at "the place of a perfect spirit who shall be a god himself" (*CT* 1116/87). The perfect sage, or rather his transformed *ba* which is analogous to the winged soul of the philosopher in Plato's *Phaedrus,* is "a spirit who knows how to enter the flame" (ibid.), i.e., the intelligible realm. Such is the soul of one "who knows" and therefore is "a holy god in the suite of Thoth" (*CT* 1035/6): his is "the clear way" (*CT* 1135/5) and "his is light" (*CT* 1137/11).

The lover of Wisdom (of Sia, who stands on the prow of the solar barque) is a follower of Thoth, and the way of Thoth leads towards the house of *maat*. When the initiate restores his primordial noetic nature and is united with the archetypal source, he can proclaim: "I have inherited the horizon of Ra. I am Atum" (*CT* 1063/34). The deceased or the initiate (who is "dead" in relation to passions and his lower human self, including the fish-like material body) is united with Ra and now appears not as a separate individuality (which is "annihilated" by the spiritual flames during his ascent), but as the immortal solar Intellect, Ra, "the companion of Thoth". As the traditional iconography depicts, he (as the universal hypostasis of the King, Son of Ra, who integrates and unites all multiplicities) stands before Hu and Sia, and other gods at the back of the solar barque. Being in the "entourage of flame", he helps to guide the solar barque and "conducts the sacred writings to the god, Ra" (*CT* 1067/38).

The true gnostic, who knows truth and his own real identity, may also be designated as belonging to the entourage of Thoth which consists of *rhyt* (*rekhyt*) or *rhhywt* (*rekhkhyut*), rendered by Leonard H. Lesko as "common folk" and "celebrated ones" respectively.[75] However, the term *rekh* means "knowledge", and Thoth is no less than the supreme master and cause of any knowledge, especially that which concerns the liberation and elevation of the soul, thus putting her in the train of Thoth himself. The dark and mysterious text runs as follows:

"You have made the entourage from your common folk. I cause that they reach you. The one who shines in the night is Ra. As for any person who is in his train, he lives forever among the followers of Thoth. It is in the night that he is made to appear and Osiris is gladdened since he is the unique one who suffered more than he did, after having been placed among his followers in the entourage" (*CT* 1098/69). Another version is slightly different: "This is the great one from whom the sky came to be. As for any person who will be in his followers, he will live in the entourage of Thoth and he will be made to appear in the night in the joy of Osiris. You are the son of the one who suffers alone. His father has been given to him in his entourage" (ibid.).

In Julian's version of Neoplatonism, inherited from Iamblichus and his school, the undefiled and pure soul, that of Heracles for instance, is regarded as superior to the purest aether. It was in this perfect condition before the Demiurge sent it to the earth and again after its philosophical and theurgic return to the Father. Of Heracles, who serves as a model for the philosophical life and ascent, it is said that he "has returned, one and indivisible, to his Father one and indivisible" (*Or. V.*, p.467 Wright).

In the Egyptian *Book of Two Ways,* the All-lord (the Creator Atum-Ra who sets up the king on the earth as his living image, Tut) asserts that whereas the gods are created from his sweat (divine perfume), human beings are from the weeping of his Eye: like tears they fall down into the material bodies of flesh. However, after "making their hearts to cease forgetting the West", i.e., introducing "philosophy" as a way of remembrance and homecoming, he opened the path of return leading upwards. Those who travel this path are able "to lift up their names to the rays of his face", i.e., to be (1) like Osiris in the midst of the Duat and (2) like Ra in the sky. Since the epistrophic movement to the noetic realm presupposes appeasing, harmonizing, and transcending of all opposites, the initiate says:

"I come into the presence of the All-lord. I made the two warriors (i.e., Horus and Seth, the Pythagorean Table of Opposites) content" (*CT* 1125/96).

This harmonization, accomplished through the guidance of Thoth, corresonds to reaching the house of truth and justice (*maat*). The Pythagoreans and Plato inherited this idea of "setting one's house in order" by self-mastery and bringing into tune all parts of the psychosomatic entity or dismembered Osiris who must be restored and attuned "like the proportion of a musical scale, the highest and lowest notes and the mean between them, with all the intermediate intervals" (*Rep.*443df). When all dismembered parts are united in a well-tempered harmony and animated by the theurgic power of Isis and Thoth, the initiate becomes like a living image of the temple-like "universal man", instead of many scattered fragments (a "house-divided"). The knowledge which presides over such transformation is wisdom, accompanied by justice which ensures (according to geometrical proportion) that each part of the whole receives what it is due.

At the level of *anima mundi* the initiate, who died already before his actual death, i.e. who discovered, awakened, and separated his *ba* from the gross mortal body, is united with Osiris, the king of an intermediate realm:

"I stand with Osiris when he stands. O Osiris, your *ba* comes to you. Open your throat. Take Osiris to Osiris" (*CT* 1120/91).

He identifies himself with one of the gods who support the sky and announce the arrival of the solar barque of Ra. Finally he pronounces:

"I am a follower of Ra who receives his iron, who replaces (or adorns) the god in the shrine, Horus who ascends to his lord. The seat was hidden in the purification of the chapel of the messenger of the God to her whom he loved. I am the one who rescued Maat after he caused his image to ascend. I am the one who knotted the rope and bound his chapel. The storm was my abomination… I have not been opposed by Ra. I have not been repulsed by him who acts with his hands. I have not walked in the valley of darkness. I have not entered into the lake of criminals. I have not been in the heat of the striking force [of God]… The holiness of God is secret. The arms of Geb rise early in the morning. Who will lead the great ones and count children at his proper time? Thoth is inside the secrets that he may make offerings to the one who counted millions and who is counted, who opened the firmament and dispelled bleariness from him after I reached him in his seat… I adore Ra that he may listen to me and that he may remove an obstacle for me. I was not turned back from the horizon. I am Ra. I was not boatless in the great crossing. It is 'He-whose-face-is-on-his-knees' who extended his arm, since the name of Ra was in my belly and his rank was in my mouth. I say it to him and I am the one who hears his words. Adoration to you, O Ra, lord of the horizon. O Ra, hail to you for whom the sun-folk purify themselves and for whom the sky acts as controller rather than the great striking force [of God] which the courses of the rebellious pass. I have come among those who herald Maat…" (*CT* 1099/70).

Hearing this dark and inspiring account, one should remember, first, that the mythical discourse is woven by images and symbols which might be subjugated to different exoteric and esoteric interpretations and are regarded as being "revealed", because "the gods wished to teach us in symbolic fashion (*didaskonton hemas oimai ton theon sumbolikos*), that we must pluck the fairest fruits from the earth, namely, virtue and piety" (Julian *Or.* V, p.473 Wright).

Second, that it is inseparable from the ritual which serves as a necessary means of elevation for those who "by nature belong to the heavens but have fallen to earth, to reap the harvest of our constitution here on earth, namely, virtue and piety, and then strive upwards to the goddess [i.e., the Phrygian Mother of the gods who may be equated also to Hathor, Nut, Neith or Isis of the Egyptians] of our forefathers, to her who is the principle of all life" (*Or.* V., p.473).

Third, that the noetic Ra is not identical with the visible Ra, the sun disk (*aten*) adored by Akhenaten. For Julian, who follows the ancient traditions of solar theologies, the visible disk of the sun is only third in rank, surpassed, as it is, by the second sun (Helios-Mithras, ruler of the intellectual gods), and the first intelligible sun which is often identified with the Good, or the One, as it shows itself in the intelligible realm. The middle and intellectual Helios is regarded (Julian in this respect cites the divine Plato, *Rep.*508b) as "the offspring of the Good which the Good begat in his own likeness, and that what the Good is in relation to pure *Nous* and its objects in the noetic world, such is the sun in the visible world in relation to sight and its objects". Therefore "his light has the same relation to the visible world as truth has to the noetic world" (*pros to noeton aletheia:* *Or.* IV, p.361).

The third or visible Helios, nonetheless, is the cause for the visible gods of just as many blessings as the second Helios bestows on the intellectual gods and serves as an anagogic force leading upwards to the invisible principles symbolized by the visible divine form and light. According to the Egyptian New Kingdom theologies, the visible world is heliophany or manifestation (*kheperu*) of the solar God himself, whose name is substituted by the term *neheh* in the Amarna texts. Initially, *neheh* is the inexhaustible noetic plenitude out of which the sun allots individual portions of time to everything existing. By seeing the light (both intelligible and sensible), that is God, the eye (including the inner eye of the soul) is created which is, therefore, sunlike *(helio-eides).*

For the theologians of the XVIII Dynasty, as for Plotinus, the solarity of the eye (or the illuminated human intellect which is "light out of light", *phos ek photos*) guarantees and reveals the inward presence of the divine, because seeing and knowing are one and the same. Seeing is to be understood in the sense of an intelligible vision, *epopteia*, as well. This possibility of proceeding from inward solarity to inward divinity, of reaching Ra through the solar *gnosis* is denied by Akhenaten for all except the king himself who, however, reduces the intelligible dimension of Ra to the visible *aten.*

As the Emperor Julian explains, light itself is a sort of incorporeal and divine form (*eidos estin asomaton ti theion*), a form coextensive with the heavenly bodies. He says:

"And of light, itself incorporeal, the culmination and flower, so to speak, is the sun's rays. Now the doctrine of the Phoenicians, who were wise and learned in sacred lore (*ton Phoinikon doxa, sophon ta theia kai epistemonon*), declared that the rays of light everywhere diffused are the undefiled incarnation of pure Intellect. And in harmony with this is our theory, seeing that light itself is incorporeal, if one should regard its fountainhead, not as corporeal, but as the undefiled activity of Intellect (i.e., Helios) pouring light into its own abode…" (*Or.* IV, p.363).

While maintaining that the uplifting rays of the sun "are nearly akin to those who yearn to be set free from generation", we ought then "to make these visible things proofs of his unseen powers" (*Or.* V., p.481). Since the souls of the blessed philosophers are led upwards by the agency of the invisible, wholly immaterial, divine and pure substance which resides in the rays of Helios, we can speak of the "solar philosophy" (presided over and directed by Helios-Apollo, Atum-Ra, Amun-Ra, or Horus, along with the great consort goddess, be it Athena, Neith, Hathor, or Isis). This solar philosophy is the same as the most holy and secret mysteries of solar rebirth. So, Julian continues as follows:

"It has also been demonstrated that the god's rays are by nature uplifting; and this is due to his energy, both visible and invisible, by which very many souls have been lifted up out of the region of the senses, because they were guided by that sense which is clearest of all and most nearly like the sun. For when with our eyes we perceive the sun's light, not only is it welcome and useful for our lives, but also, as the divine Plato said when he sang its praises, it is our guide to wisdom. And if I should also touch on the secret teaching of the Mysteries (*tes arrhetou mustagogias*) in which the Chaldean, divinely frenzied, celebrated the God of the Seven Rays, that god through whom he lifts up the soul of men, I should be saying what is unintelligible, wholly unintelligible to the common herd, but familiar to the happy theurgists (*theourgois de tois makariois gnorima: Or. V.*,p.483).

15. Celestial Nile as the Cause of Geometry

The Pythagorean claim that ten is "complete at four" refers to the Tetraktys, established on the natural sequence of numbers: 1+2+3+4=10. The Tetraktys, arranged into the sacred triangle, represents both an archetypal unity of all reality and a model for the gradual procession from the indescribable light of unity to the level of sensibles. This means the coming forth from the One (though the One is not diminished and remains intact in its transcendent fullness) to the Many and the final return back to the One.

Since the procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*) are not chronological or temporal events in the usual sense, they constitute a single movement where each thing reverts in its own proper mode. There is no real distinction between procession and reversion, which are descriptions of the ontological status of any determinate being. Procession (descent) is the cause giving itself to the effect as the perfection by which it is; though the One, as universal cause being "everywhere and nowhere", is both transcendent and causally present to all things. Reversion (ascent) is the effect receiving the cause as the perfection (*telos*) by which it is. To be is to be intelligible, to have the noetic paradigm or divine root. The One is both the beginning and the end, the *arche* and the *telos* of all things. Therefore:

"The entire Neoplatonic pattern of exitus and reditus, the emergence of all things from the One or Good and their return to him, is simply the expression, in dynamic terms, of their participation in him as 'measure of all things'".[76]

The same could be said regarding the manifestations (*kheperu*) of Amun (*jmnw*) who, despite the creative theophanies, himself remains hidden:

"The One who created himself, whose appearance (*qj*) is unknown.
Perfect aspect, which developed into a sacred emanation.
Who built his processional images and created himself by himself.
Perfect icon (*sekhem nefer*), whom his heart made perfect.
Manifestation of manifestation (*kheperu kheperu*), model of birth" (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.40.1-8).

"The Ennead is combined in your body: your image is every god"… (ibid. I.350.90.1-2).

This hymn, consecrated to Amun-Ra, is constructed as a series of plays on words and numbers, therefore its inner structure itself reflects the procession from the One to the ordered Manyness. The Pythagorean Tetraktys, whose nine strokes or dots represent the Great Ennead of Heliopolis grouped around the tenth or rather the first dot, the ineffable and incomprehensible One, is also derived from Egypt. In the temple of Amun-Ra in Karnak the Tetraktys is expanded into the Pentactys – from nine to fifteen hypostases of Amun-Ra – "twelve strokes encircling the divine creative triangle, and representing this triangle manifested".[77]Amun-Ra emerges from Nun who stands for the hidden side of Amun himself. This noetically manifested Scarab, Amun-Ra, is the supreme paradigm of being and creator of everything. To put it in Procline terms, *Nous* is everything after the manner of intellect, and *Psuche* is everything after the manner of soul:

"If *Nous* is exemplar, soul is copy; if *Nous* is everything in concentration, soul is everything discursively" (*ET* 16).

The hypostasis of Intellect and that of universal Soul constitute the compound of Ra and Osiris, both at the cosmological level of divine macrocosm and the eschatological level of human microcosm.

To move from the sensible world of images and multiplicity of material bodies to the noetic multiplicity in unity is possible through the contemplation of geometrical figures, diagrams, and symbols (analogous to the Hindu *yantras* and *mandalas*), projected in the Imagination which occupies, according to Proclus, the central position in the scale of knowing:

"When it (*phantasia*) draws its objects from the undivided centre of its life, it expresses them in the medium of division, extension, and figure. For this reason everything that it thinks is a picture or shape of its thought" (*In Euclid* 52-53).

Since the geometer wishes to move from divisible figures presented in Imagination (passive *Nous*) to the partless, indivisible, unextended figures of divine *Nous*, he investigates the universal present in the imagined circle (which is "one and many", falling short of the purity and perfection of immaterial circles), bearing in mind that the universal is not merely a picture in the Imagination, but an archetypal reality which displays indivisible noetic unity. As the ascending *ba* must be transformed and turned into *akh* (thereby transcending the psychic realm of Osiris), so the geometer, as a follower of Hermes-Thoth, must leave aside the entire sensible realm and the Osirian Netherworld.

Various sciences serve as a means of ascending from the more partial to the more general until the science of being as being is reached, and this science contemplates the single form of being that belongs to all things. Therefore geometry working with the aid of imagination is able to bring about recollection of eternal ideas in the soul. *Mathematike* (or *mathesis*, learning) shows the innate knowledge and purges understanding, taking away forgetfulness and ignorance, setting the soul free from the bonds of unreason by the favour of Hermes-Thoth. This god, according to Proclus, "is truly the patron of this science, who brings our intellectual endowments to light, fills everything with divine reason, moves our souls towards *Nous*, awakens us as it were from our heavy slumber, through our searching turns us back upon ourselves, through our birth-pangs perfects us, and through the discovery of pure *Nous* leads us to the blessed life" (*In Euclid.* I.47).

Proclus does not forget to mention (probably basing his account on a history composed by Eudemus of Rhodes, a pupil of Aristotle) that Thales, traditionally counted as one of the Seven Sages, was the first to bring this science from Egypt to Greece, arguing that every true geometer should move from imagination to pure noetic understanding with each theorem laying the basis for a step upwards and drawing the soul to the higher world. Thus, following the Platonic division of knowing and being to 1) the highest, 2) the intermediate, and 3) the lowest grades of reality, Proclus says:

"But if it should ever be able to roll up its extensions and figures and view their plurality as a unity without figure, then in turning back to itself it would obtain a superior vision of the partless, unextended, and essential geometrical ideas that constitute its equipment. This achievement would itself be a perfect culmination of geometrical inquiry, truly a gift of Hermes, leading geometry out of Calypso's arms, so to speak, to more perfect intellectual insight and emancipating it from the pictures projected in imagination" (*In Euclid.* II.55).

Proclus regards the Nile as a symbol of the life which is poured on the whole world (*In Tim.* I.96). Accordingly, "the Nile is the cause to the Egyptians of many and all-various goods, viz. of geometry, of the generation of fruits… Its water also preserves their bodies, and the divinity that connectedly contains this body, elevates their souls" (*In Tim.* I.118). If the Nile is the cause of geometry, primarily the celestial Nile is meant, that which is equivalent to Osiris and, ultimately, to the rejuvenating primordial Waters of Nun. In its immanent aspect, this Water of life, immortality, and regeneration is manifested, in different fashions and manners, through all levels of being. Therefore the Egyptian priests knowing that "there are likewise divine mysteries, some powers initiating, and others being initiated", regarded the destruction through water and fire as purification, not corruption (ibid. I.119). Geometry also serves this aim of purification leading the soul, likened to Odysseus, away from Calypso's charms and tortures.

16. The Apollonian Road to Rebirth

The ancients held that there is nothing that cannot be cured by philosophy and theurgy. Philosophy serves to purify from all lower modes of life, habits, and desires, providing understanding and strengthening virtues. For the supreme virtue teaches souls to cling to the truth which is "most clearly manifest in the worship of the Divine Being" (Julian *Ep.*82). And the theurgic rites, bestowed by the gods themselves ("since it is evident that the gods gave them to us": *Ep.*20), benefit both soul and body:

"The gods when they exhort those theurgists who are especially holy, announce to them that their 'mortal husk of raw matter' shall be preserved from perishing" (*Or.* V., p.499).

Therefore Julian, who faithfully follows tradition and avoids innovation in all things, but especially in what concerns the gods (*Ep.*20), describes the graceful power of the hieratic rites as follows:

"For when the soul abandons herself wholly to the gods, and entrusts her own concerns absolutely to the higher powers, and then follows the sacred rites – these too being preceded by the divine ordinances – then, I say, since there is nothing to hinder or prevent – for all things reside in the gods, all things subsist in relation to them, all things are filled with the gods (*kai panta ton theon esti plere*) – straightway the divine light illumines our souls" (*Or.* V, p.497).

Since philosophy concerns the contemplation of realities (*ta onta*) and elevating knowledge which prepares the soul for the divine vision and re-union with the archetypal principles, it is not at variance with the Mysteries performed for human perfection and salvation. The end and aim of the rite of purification is "the ascent of our souls" (*Or.* V, p.489), and this is the aim of philosophy as well, though achieved by rather different means and methods. But if philosophy is "knowledge of the things that are", according to Ammonius, son of Hermeias, the Alexandrian philosopher of the 5th century, and the world which is (*panta ta onta*) presents itself as the harmonious play of divine powers (*dunameis*), mysterious symbols and tokens (*sunthemata*), then the thirst for the marvellous is not incompatible with the strictly rational and logical inquiry.

Sosipatra from Ephesus became a "philosopher" not through conventional learning but because she, as a young girl, was initiated into the Chaldean wisdom by two old men who belonged to some divine race or were "gods disguised as strangers". Eunapius, who exercised a high priestly function of hierophant at the mystery cult of Eleusis and was convinced that the ancient gods were not dead, but still walked on the earth and took care of chosen ones, says about Sosipatra as follows:

"As she reached full maturity, never having any other teachers, the works of the [great] poets, philosophers, and orators were [constantly] on her lips and texts that others had spent a great deal of painstaking trouble over [and] understood only dimly and with difficulty she could interpret casually, effortlessly, and with ease, making meaning clear with her light, swift touch".[78]

If Sosipatra and her son Antoninus, who "reached affinity with the divine, and applied himself to the wisdom that is unknown to the crowd", are regarded as philosophers, what does "philosophy" mean for the ancients? According to Eunapius, Antoninus established himself at the mouth of the Nile, close to Alexandria, and devoted himself completely to Plato's philosophy and the Egyptian rites as they were practised there:

"All the young men who were healthy in mind and thirsted for philosophy studied with him, and the temple was full of candidates of the priesthood".[79]

It is clear that philosophy, as understood by Antoninus (who died A.D.390), radically differs from the modern conception: it includes inner transformation and an approach to the divine. Mediterranean philosophy has developed within the chains of transmission kept by the priests of Apollo and Persephone. In its post-Homeric form, *philosophia* (not designated yet by this late Pythagorean term) reveals itself as the tradition of iatromantis (spiritual healers) and lawgivers, based on continuous revelations received from above, from the world of the *kourotropos*, "nurturer of the *kouros*". The last term means "a young man" in the sense of an initiate, like *fata* in Arabic and *javanmard* in Persian. The *kouros* is not just a human figure, but the representation and reflection (*eikon*) of the divine *kouros*, Apollo. This is the charming glow of youth (*chariestate hebe*), of "eternal youth" proper to the gods. Therefore Athena, touching Odysseus (who is regarded as a model of philosophical life) with the golden wand, "gives him back his handsome bearing and his youth" (*Od.* XVI.173-183).

In certain respects, Apollo (from Akkadian *abullu*), the initiator into philosophy as a "solar way", could be equated to al-Khidr of the Sufis. The Apollonian road is the road of the archetypal Sun, Ra-Osiris, who is the chief Mystagogue of the entire cosmos. Therefore a philosophical journey is the mimetic and ritual-like journey of the hero, like Heracles and Orpheus, to the Netherworld, the Egyptian Duat, where all the opposites meet. This is the process of 'dying before death' and resurrection. Since Apollo shares his oracular powers with Night, the archaic "philosopher" is a priest and a prophet both of Apollo and Night. He is a spiritual healer who knows the words of power. As the initiate, the "philosopher" approaches the Sun (the symbol of the divine Intellect and the One) and through the Sun he is born again. This man is also a "physician" (*phusikos*), because he is concerned with the basic principles of being. According to P. Kingsley, "philosophy had developed as something all-embracing and intensely practical",[80] including a sort of *kundalini-yoga* and healing through dreams and oracles. Parmenides, the disciple of the Pythagorean Ameinias, who introduced a logic that questions everything, himself was an Ouliades, a priest of Apollo.

Philosophy should not be restricted to the analysis of language and logic as has happened in modern times. Until the end of the Graeco-Roman world, philosophy was regarded as a mystery into which one may be initiated. Plato himself uses the mystery-language, though in some respects he "betrayed" or at least "reclothed" the true Parmenidean and Orphic tradition. Proclus, who tried to harmonize *logos* and *muthos*, the Hellenic rational metaphysics and ancient mythologies, speaks of Plato's teaching as *mustagogia* (the guidance of the initiates into mysteries) and *epopteia* (the ineffable vision), viewing Plato himself as the leader and hierophant to the truest rites (*teletai*). The Middle Platonist Theon of Smyrna distinguished five stages in philosophical initiation: purification, communication of the ritual, mystical vision (*epopteia*), "adornment with garlands", and "the joy that comes from unity and converse with the gods".[81]

According to some modern scholars, the new way of thinking attributed to Thales involved the search for a non-mythical origin for the cosmos and required arguments supporting the conclusions reached. But the picture of Thales himself, stored in the imagination of later generations, stands at variance with the general ancient picture of the sage (*sophos*) who must be an extremely practical servant of the gods: the priest, magician, healer, lawgiver, teacher, and the guide of souls, at one and the same time. If philosophy is regarded as the emancipation of discursive reason (*dianoia*) from the previously integral structure of the whole traditional culture, deeming all things in the city (*polis*) to be trifling and of no value, then philosophy really comes to be equal to the abstract star-gazing and discursive reasoning about ghostly principles.

The philosopher Thales is so caught up in contemplation that he takes no notice of the path ahead and falls into a well, making himself the laughing-stock of "a witty and attractive Thracian servant-girl who is said to have mocked Thales for falling into a well while he was observing stars and gazing upwards, declaring that he was eager to know the things in the sky, but that what was behind him and just by his feet escaped his notice" (Plato *Theaetetus* 174a).

Iamblichus is ready to turn into virtue the ridiculous naivety of the philosopher who gets into all sorts of embarrassments because of his ignorance, and behaves so awkwardly that people look upon him as a madman:

"It is said, for example, that Thales astronomizing and looking intently upward fell into a well, and a bright and lively Thracian girl taunted him about the accident, saying that in his eagerness to know what was in heaven he could not see what was around him and under his feet. Now the same taunt is good for all students of Philosophy. They are indeed ignorant of what their nearest neighbour is about, and almost whether or not he is a human being".[82]

This view about philosophy is accepted not for the sake of a discursive rationalism. Rather there is a desire to show the anagogic and soteriological nature of philosophical theology: not simply contemplation but eventual "emigration" to the transcendental realm is regarded as the main philosophical task. The Middle Platonists and Plotinus already eliminated politics from philosophy and spiritualized the latter. But despite the unreal political dreams, even for Plato himself the ultimate task of philosophy (which involved all sorts of rational thought and logical argumentation) is not to learn dialectical methods for their own sake but to regain the soul's wings and return to the celestial abode. The Platonic way leading to the archetypal star imitates the Egyptian way of ascent, once restricted to the king, equated with Horus, the son of Ra, and later followed by the initiated philosophers who tried to accomplish this spiritual ascent before actual physical death. This path conforms with the Orphic esoterism and with the archaic belief in the soul's journey through the Milky Way (*kuklos galaxias*).

The aim of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is a return to the habitation of the soul's consort star and an experience of the subsequent bliss (*Tim.*41-42). Those who have devoted themselves to philosophy are able to ascend "to mansions even more beautiful than these" (*Phaed.*114bc) and to join the company of the gods gazing at the world of true Being. They contemplate the region which "belongs to Being as it really is – without colour or shape, untouchable, perceptible only to the soul's pilot, the intellect, which is concerned with the genus of true knowledge" (*Phaedr.*247c). Though intellectual purification and recollection (*anamnesis*) are counted among the most important means to reach the aetherial home-star and the company of the gods, nonetheless, the inspired divine "madness" (*mania*) is regarded as surpassing all purely rational understanding.

Consequently, the hieratic arts cannot be understood as something incompatible with philosophy, when viewed as a stairway to the noetic cosmos constituted by Being, Life, and Intelligence. Since true Being is "visible to nous alone, the pilot of the soul" (*Phaedr.*247c), which is not discursive, dialectic cannot in principle grant the comprehensive understanding of reality (or union with the divine principles themselves), though both Socrates and Plato take the position that only dialectic is an appropriate medium for initial philosophizing. However, by making a distinction between *sophia* and *doxosophia*, between "truly understanding" and "seeming to be much knowing", Plato strongly emphasizes that while the human soul aspires to the divine, its highest achievement is to follow Zeus, not to usurp him. In his most important cosmological speculations, Plato uses mythical accounts, because a myth, unlike a syllogism, has the capacity to act as a complex mirror in which we can recognize not only who we are but also who we might become beyond our restricted earthly existence. As Ch. L. Griswold argues:

"The message of the *Phaedrus* is clear: philosophy is a form of private eros, and it is essentially nobler and higher than the political concerns and the public rhetoric of the polis. Philosophical madness cannot double as political doctrine without losing its divinity." [83]

Neoplatonic theurgy is also based on the anagogic interpretation of the philosophical myths that provide the background of Egyptian, Chaldean, and Orphic esoterism. The regret of A. Charles-Saget that unlike Ionian philosophers, who moved from myth to philosophy, Iamblichus moves in the opposite direction,[84] depends on a too narrow and rationalistic apprehension of philosophy. Though the definition of philosophy as a mental activity or as a purely human reasoning process emerged from Hellenic sources, philosophy is part of a complex of much wider religious and aesthetic aspirations. When Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry for using one single method, called *philosophia*, to examine all subjects, including the inspired myths and telestic arts, he accuses him of approaching divine mysteries by inadequate means. The problems of the soul's embodiment and disembodiment, like those of theurgic unification with the gods, must be approached hieratically, not conceptually. They are not to be solved in a discursive mode.

In Iamblichean metaphysics, the human soul, as a particular complex of collected characteristics, is never saved. It can be turned to the gods only as the Egyptian Horus is united to Ra: not as a particular individuality, but as the entire mandala-like structure of irradiations, turned back to their noetic and henadic archetypes, when the divine power (as the immortal microcosmic *eros*) is joined with itself in prayer or theurgic ascent. The soul is only a mean between abiding and proceeding, the ungenerated and the generated. Though our knowledge concerning the gods is both inborn and acquired through the process of education, it is still divided and cannot actually touch the undivided principles. Iamblichus makes a clear distinction between discursive reasoning (*dianoia*) and intellection (*noesis*), but even *philosophia* and *noesis* do not themselves lead to an actual union with the divine. Along with *noesis*, which acts at different levels of being, something more fundamental and ineffable is required. It is only with the theurgic virtues that the fullest henadic form of the subject-object unity can be achieved.

17. Philosophy as Divine Mystagogy and Beneficial Madness

At the beginning of philosophy as such we do not find a titanic inquiry and a sacrilegious doubt. Philosophy rather begins with 1) the inspired interpretations of divine oracles, epiphanies, and omens, 2) commentaries on the inner meaning of annual cosmogonical and anagogic rites, of sacred calendars, genealogies, and myths of origin. Such primordial "philosophy" is involved in conversation with the community of hieratic forces which permeate the universe. Accordingly, philosophical discourse starts as a mythical *hieros logos* and concerns theophanies and symbols of which the cosmos is woven. Therefore "philosophy" in its purest form is akin to liturgy which enumerates and praises various divine qualities or prototypes of human thought and action. The human being wonders at the face of unspeakable divine manifestations, truths, and beauties that constitute the complex of the visible and invisible worlds, thus proving the harmony between the microcosmic and macrocosmic orders (*taxeis*). This wonder shows the primordial unity of devotion, contemplation, and intentional "erotic" striving for wisdom (*sophia*), able to reveal the countless possibilities in the sphere of skills, arts, technologies, laws, and institutions which are open to different reflections, meditations, and explanations.

"Without philosophy it is impossible to be perfectly pious", according to the Egyptian Hermetic writer (*Stobaei Hermetica*). In the Hermetic milieu, so inaccurately described as "the underworld of Platonism" by J. Dillon,[85] philosophy is regarded both as a human science (*episteme*) and divine knowledge (*gnosis*). Thus the successive course from the natural sciences, mathematics, astronomy and music towards the *pura sanctue philosophia* is emphasized. Despite the serious doubts of modern scholars, it is now clear that the so-called Hermetic texts contain authentic versions of the Egyptian theological lore, in agreement with Iamblichus' assertion that the writings attributed to Hermes (who is the heart and tongue of Ra) contain Hermetic doctrines expressed in philosophical terms, because "they have been translated from Egyptian by scholars versed in philosophy" (*De myster.*265.13-17).

Adherents of different philosophical schools (*haireseis*) regarded philosophy as a mystery into which one may be initiated. This is not just an empty metaphor but rather an indication which reveals the real sources of ancient philosophy understood as a way of purification, interpretation of sacred rites and divine visions. Therefore when Proclus speaks of Plato's teaching as a *mustagogia* and *epopteia*, he is not introducing a startling innovation but simply following the ancient tradition (*paradosis*). At the time of Syrianus and Proclus, the Orphic, Chaldean and other rituals were a part of philosophical practice. Even if one prefers to regard the mystery-language used by Plato himself (*Symp.*209e, *Gorg.*479c, *Theaet.*156a) merely as an instance of his extolled "irony", nevertheless, the most influential philosophical insights of Plato reveal the affinity of true philosophical education with *arrhetos telete* – the "unspeakable initiation". Platonism is modelled on the experience of mysteries. The highest step of philosophy is analogous to *epopteia* – the beatific vision of the Eleusinian mysteries.

Not simply the exegesis of Plato's *Parmenides* but the actual mystical experience gives foundation for negative theology, and this mystical experience (in its original Hellenic sense) does not consist in learning something but in undergoing the initiation into divine epiphanies and preparation for the blessed afterlife. The traditional Hellenic religion sometimes presented the epiphany, or vision, of a particular god as a goal of mystical experience. The Eleusinian mysteries and, in later times, the mysteries of Isis, Mithras as well as the Chaldean rites of ascent (*anagoge*) and Orphic myths served as the models for philosophy. "The One is God" (*to hen theos*), according to Proclus, "for the Good is identical with God, God being that which is beyond all things and to which all things aspire" (*ET* 113). But if a plurality of gods exist, they must have the character of unity, since by the term "gods" here are understood the supreme archetypes or "the first and self-sufficient principles of being" (*tas protistas archas ton onton kai autarkestatas theois apokalousi: Plat. Theol.* I.3.13.6-7). Consequently, "every god is a self-complete henad" (*ET* 114), and "every god is above Being, above Life, and above Intelligence" (*pas theos huperousios esti kai huperzoos kai hupernous: ET* 115). And every god is participate, except the One (*ET* 116). Therefore everything reverts upon its cause and even inanimate objects aspire to imitate the Good: "all things pray except the One", according to Theodorus of Asine (Procl. *In Tim.* I.213.2-3).

There are different levels in philosophical inquiry, according to Syrianus: 1) first philosophy is concerned with intelligible substance; 2) on a lower level is a philosophical discipline dealing with heavenly bodies; 3) finally, there is the study of the sensible world of coming to be and passing away (*In Metaph.*55.13).

The first philosophy, or metaphysics, here is considered to be a theology, a study of divine substance. But since "mythology is a kind of theology" (*he gar muthologia theologia tis estin*), as Hermeias pointed out (*In Phaedr.*73.18), mythology is not excluded from philosophy. There is no clear distinction between "theologizing" by writing poetry in which truths about the gods are presented in a veiled form and "theologizing" by interpreting this poetry allegorically.

The aim of philosophy is to rearrange our whole life according to divine prototypes. Therefore philosophy as a "love of wisdom" cannot be reduced to philology – merely a "love of speech". Philosophical discourse is just one (though the most distinct) among other means that justify our choice of a particular way of life and support us on the spiritual path towards the final truth and enlightenment.

In the traditional Hellenic sense, (1) theology deals with the names, genealogies, theogonies, mythical substances, and iconographies of the gods; (2) philosophical exegesis deals with their metaphysical structure at the same time providing the basis for contemplation of truly existing beings and promising a happy life in accord with intellect; (3) theurgy deals with the sacramental means of ascent towards and actual union with the gods. The relationship between theology (understood either as a theology of inspired poets and prophets, or as the 'scientific" post-Aristotelian metaphysics) and philosophy is not very clear. Both of them use the multi-dimentional *logos*, rational discursive reasoning and intellectual intuition (*noesis),* though the former stands much closer to the realm of myth and depends on certain divine revelations adapted to the particular human imagination and sensibility. When Porphyry argues that it is not rational knowledge that leads us to happiness and true contemplation, he makes a distinction between *dianoia* and *noesis.* The unifying, or henadic, power of the gods, however, is above all human intellection, according to Iamblichus, although *noesis* is a necessary element in human co-operation with the divine and in some respects may be regarded as a part of union itself.

Plotinus made a distinction between the "civic virtues" and the "purificatory virtues". His famous follower, Porphyry the Phoenician, added two other grades: the "theoretic virtues" and the "paradigmatic virtues", the former being that of the soul of a philosopher which turns to *nous* within itself and contemplates its noetic contents, the latter being the virtue proper to Intellect itself, not the aspiring observer. Iamblichus discerned two additional grades at both ends of the hierarchy: the "natural virtues" at the lowest level and the "hieratic virtues" at the highest. Within this sevenfold hierarchy of virtues, accepted by the later Neoplatonists, theological virtues are the same as the paradigmatic virtues. They are above the theoretic, or properly "philosophical", virtues, if philosophy is regarded as the way from the realm of sense and lower imagination to the realm of *nous*, passing through the intermediate dianoetical and mathematical levels. But only with theurgic, or hieratic, virtues which crown the hierarchy and transcend being (*ousia*) as such are we united with the ineffable God which stands at the beginning of one or another particular chain (*seira*) of ontological manifestations.

Porphyry retains an anthropocentric view of human relations with the divine and is convinced that pious actions and reverence for the gods accompanied by virtue and wisdom are enough for the ascent; Iamblichus proves the necessity of synthems (*sunthemata*) which are *aporrheta sumbola* – the ineffable symbols and attributes of the gods – sown by the Demiurge throughout the cosmos in order to serve as a support for mystical remembrance (*anamnesis*). They are the means (*organa*) which transmit the efficient anagogic and henadic power of the transcendental principles. According to A. C. Lloyd, there is no doubt that Iamblichus put theurgy, as liberation of soul, above philosophy:

"But while his philosophy is full of abstract processions and reversions, philosophy was nothing for him if not itself a reversion, a return to the One, though achieving only an incomplete union. Its place can be seen in an almost fantastically elaborated metaphysical system…"[86]

The achievement of divine union (*henosis*) depends on the entire complex of divine causes and powers. They include the proper use of theurgic synthems (*sunthemata*) and traditional cosmogonical rites, as well as intellectual intuition (*noesis*), rational education and virtues (*aretai*). Therefore Iamblichus tries to reveal the integral connection between sacred liturgies, rituals of cultic worship, interpretation of oracles and the intellectual disciplines of philosophical *paideia*. As G. Shaw pointed out, such an interpretation had been the goal of Plato himself,[87] since *theourgia* (the term originated among the Middle Platonists to describe the deifying power of Chaldean and Egyptian rites) fulfilled the goal of philosophy understood as a *homoiosis theo*, restoring the "likeness to God" (Plat. *Theaet.*176b). The "likeness to God" is the *telos* of our life and is to be attained by knowledge (*gnosis*), since "knowledge of the gods is virtue and wisdom and perfect happiness, and makes us like to the gods" (Iamb. *Protrep.* ch.3, p.11, 14f).

All Neoplatonic philosophers, including Plotinus, emphasized the ultimate dependence of man on the divine source both ontologically and spiritually, or intellectually. Both cultic practices (invocations, sacrifices, animations of statues) and philosophic education (*paideia)* are rooted in the ineffable power of the gods; therefore the concept of "grace" might be seen even in the Plotinian philosophical concept of *eros*. But whereas traditional Platonic *paideia* had traced an ascent to the gods (or the archetypal stars) through harmonious assimilation to cosmic orders, Plotinus and Porphyry (following the ancient Delphic maxim) transformed the Platonic *homoiosis theo* into a likeness to the inner Self, equated with the divine Intellect. They promoted purely philosophical rationalism and mysticism, thus threatening to desacralize the traditional cosmos. According to Porphyry:

"In every respect the philosopher is the saviour of himself" *(De abstin.* II.49.2).

For him the philosopher is a priest and not the other way round.[88] Aristotle considers that self-reflectivity and knowledge of self coincide in God, because in thinking about thinking, God thinks about himself. But the self-knowledge of Intellect (*nous*) is the knowledge of Being (*ousia)*, not the knowledge of a private self. For Plotinus and Porphyry our *nous* does not fall into body but ceaselessly operates in the noetic sphere (*Enn.* IV.8.8.1). Therefore by rejecting the Plotinian concept of the undescending noetic summit of our soul – which is always in active contemplation of the divine realities even though "we" *(hemeis*) might have fallen, Iamblichus also rejected the Porphyrian tendency to treat the lower levels of existence as a mere illusion.

Since the cosmos itself should be regarded as paradigmatic theurgy – imitated by the priests in various hieratic rites – *theourgia* is not a mere preparation for the philosophical life, suited to those incapable of philosophical liberation, as Porphyry thought. Rather it may be likened to the multi-levelled trunk of the mythological World Tree which displays theophanies as leaves and reveals the divine powers (*dunameis*) while connecting and uniting the realms of Earth and Heaven. Since Plato himself had acknowledged that his writings are to be regarded merely as a prelude (*propaideia*) to deeper mysteries (*Ep.* VII.341cd), Iamblichus not only argues that Plato's philosophical teachings are integrally related to the hieratic traditions of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians, but also tries to explain Oriental wisdom using Platonic[89] and sometimes Aristotelian categories. He believed that Plato himself was initiated into Egyptian and Chaldean mysteries.

The divine origin and mission of Pythagoras (sent down into the material world as a sort of bodhisatva) Iamblichus interpreted in terms of the *Phaedrus* myth (246e-248c). Proclus' master Syrianus also linked Pythagorean philosophy with the ancient theologians – Orpheus, Homer and the Chaldean sages – not failing to connect the decline in contemporary philosophical insight with the myth of the *Phaedrus (In Metaph.*82.15-20). Since Pythagoras' revelation with its concern for immaterial realities stands for all that is true in Hellenic philosophy, both Plato and Aristotle (to the extent that the latter remains faithful to the Pythagorean tradition) are regarded as Pythagoreans by Iamblichus. He not only adopted and Pythagoreanized Aristotelian logic, but also mathematized all areas of philosophy.[90] The traditional conceptions of the gods and the physical universe as well as various sciences (*mathemata*) and methods of contemplation *(theoria*) were mediated by Pythagoras and intended for purification and opening the eye of intellect. This opening enables the soul to see true principles and the causes of all things. Philosophy is a road, according to Iamblichus, and those are really wise who join effects to their causes and contemplate the truth in all things. The contemplation of the universe must be preferred to all things which seem to be useful:

'To the philosopher alone is there a correct representation of those things which are of and from themselves accurate exemplars, immutable Ideas, for he is a spectator of things themselves but not of imitations of these. ... For he alone who looks to nature and the divine truly lives, just as a good ruler drawing from immortal and stable sources the principles of living advances and lives according to them himself. This science therefore is both theoretic and productive, as we do all things according to it."[91]

While recognizing a unity between the theologies of Egyptians, Chaldeans, Pythagoreans and Plato, Iamblichus emphasizes the dependance of Hellenic philosophers (including Plato and Pythagoras) on the Egyptian priests (*De myster.*: 2.2-3.5). Hellenic philosophy is systematically subordinated to ancient revelations. Iamblichus, according to M. J. Edwards, "did not wish to be a scholar, for the business of the philosopher is not with facts, but lives".[92] However, he does not exclude or banish reason. Notwithstanding the fact that we cannot attain knowledge (*gnosis*) of the gods by reason (*logismos*), the role of reasoning is crucial. If correctly used, it provides a clear discrimination of what is possible and impossible, real and unreal. For Iamblichus "there is a distinction between the words science and knowledge: the one signifying the theoretic faculty by which we apprehend real beings, the other the practical faculty by which we acquire phenomenal facts and information".[93] But those who have intellect must philosophize:

"If therefore philosophy alone by reason of its nature causes perfect virtue and purification of the soul, that alone is worthy to be desired and sought. But to the company of the gods none may go who has not sought wisdom and departed in perfect purity; none but the lover of learning. And this is the reason why true philosophers abstain from the indulgence of all corporeal desires or passions…"[94]

"For to cleanse the soul of every taint of generation, and to purify that actuality of it to which the power of reason belongs, is the chief function of Philosophy."[95]

The *Phaedrus* of Plato exemplifies the mission of a superior soul sent down to save fallen souls and to recall them through philosophy to higher realities. Therefore Hermeias, the Alexandrian philosopher, whose commentary on *Phaedrus* depends both on Syrianus' lectures and metaphysical interpretations of Iamblichus, says:

'Socrates has been sent down to the world of becoming to benefit mankind and the souls of the young. Since souls differ greatly in character and practices, he benefits each in a different way… turning them to philosophy' (*In Phaedr.* I.1-5).

Socrates, who receives his erotic power and anagogic energy from Eros, is referred to as a saviour who seeks to bring back souls who have fallen from the divine company of the gods. Philosophy and poetry are regarded as two different but integrally related forms of divinely-inspired madness (*mania*). Therefore the agreement between theologians (Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus), poets, and philosophers is based on their common divine sources of inspiration and their anagogic function for the benefit of mankind. Hermeias makes clear the revelatory and soteriological nature of philosophy.[96] True philosophers are divine-like souls who have not cut themselves off from participation in the vision of the heavenly retinue, or army (*stratia*), of the gods, described in the *Phaedrus.*

In this sense philosophy is a sort of divine mystagogy. It is also divinely-inspired beneficial madness. According to A. Sheppard, Hermeias distinguishes seven levels within the soul at which inspiration (*enthousiasmos)* can occur. These correspond to levels of reality in the universe as a whole, and they are: 1) the one within the soul (*hen tes psuches*), 2) intellect (*nous*), 3) discursive reason (*dianoia),* 4) opinion *(doxa*), 5) imagination (*phantasia*), 6) spirit *(thumos*, in the original Platonic sense of the word), 7) desire (*epithumia*).[97] Hermeias explains anagogically the four types of divinely-inspired madness, mentioned by Plato (*Phaedr.*244a8-245a8) and integrally exemplified by Orpheus who had all types of inspiration, by drawing the following picture:

1) *poietike mania* brings the disordered parts of the soul into order and harmony through heaven-inspired poetry and music;
2) *telestike mania* is the state concerned with purifications, theurgic rites, and associated with the mysteries; it makes the soul whole and raises it to the level of Intellect (*nous*);
3) *mantike mania*, traditionally exhibited by the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona, is associated with Apollo and gathers the soul together to its own unity;
4) *erotike mania* takes the unified soul and joins the one within soul (*to hen tes psuches*), equated with the charioteer's head of the *Phaedrus* myth) to the gods and to noetic beauty (*tois theois kai to noeto kallei sunaptei: In Phaedr.* II.1-2).[98]

The last *mania* brings about a mystical union. According to A. Sheppard,[99] Hermeias follows up Plato's distinction between two kinds of prophecy and two kinds of poetry, the inspired and merely skilled (*technike*), to make a parallel distinction between two kinds of *telestike*: (1)"human and merely skilled *telestike*" (such as priests use in the cults of statues and incantations according to the different local traditions) and (2) divinely-inspired *telestike* which not only makes our soul perfect, but also leads to mystical union.

Iamblichus' concept of inspiration is in agreement with Plato's concept of prophetic, or Apollonian (*Apolloniake*), madness and with traditional Hellenic ideas of divine possession. It proves that Neoplatonic theurgy (though closely connected with Chaldean and Egyptian religious sources) is also modelled on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* when read in the light of traditional soteriological mysteries, post-Aristotelian metaphysics and Hellenistic astronomy. However, theurgy is not simply a fruit of spiritual hermeneutics, but rather a prolongation, or revival, of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian esoteric traditions, framed by cosmological myths and rituals.

Some scholars assume that Iamblichus simply translated the metaphysics and psychology of Plotinus into the terminology of Chaldean theurgy (and thus spoiled the purity of the former), but such a view is too naïve and shows a tendency to regard Plotinus' flight of the solitary soul towards the solitary One in terms of Western Christian mysticism and modern subjectivism, along with the post-Enlightment hate or fear of any sacramental rites. Therefore we are inclined to think that philosophy and theurgy, in the late Neoplatonic tradition, are not to be regarded as two different ways to the same goal, as H. Lewy once suggested.[100] Rather both *philosophia* and *hieratike techne* are the indispensable elements that constitute an extensive and interlaced spiritual path ("not in space but through one's life", as Olympiodorus explains: *In Gorg.* I.2, p.240.20 Norvin), adapted to different types of men and leading through different heroes, daimons, angels and gods to the mysterious and ineffable One which transcends all things.

As Iamblichus pointed out, each man performs his service to the gods (who grant health of body, virtue of soul, purity of intellect, and elevation to proper principles) according to what he is, not according to what he is not. Therefore the sacrifice must not surpass the proper measure of the worshipper (*to oikeion metron tou therapeuontos: De myster.*220.6-9). Different classes of soul proceed in different and unequal ranks, but in the last regard the soul's descent and self-alienation as well as its ascent and *henosis* are activities of the gods themselves on the stage of divine irradiations. When invocation, or prayer, arises from the realised human nothingness and awakens the divine presence in the soul, "the divine itself quite literally is joined with itself", according to Iamblichus (*De myster.* I.15; 47.9-11).

In the later Hellenic antiquity, disciples of Platonism surrounding their master compared themselves to a chorus. Iamblichus, the head of the Neoplatonic school in Syrian Apamea, is referred to by Libanius as the leader of a chorus of souls gathered to the gods. Hypatia of Alexandria is regarded as "a genuine guide in the mysteries of philosophy" (*gnesia kathegemon ton philosophias orgion:* Synesius *Ep.*137). The members of her circle participated in the 'philosophical mysteries' open to initiates only.

Their community of *betairoi* was knitted together with strong ties and constituted a microcosm reflecting the laws of the universe.[101] The characterization of philosophy as 'the most ineffable of ineffable mysteries' into whose sacred rites initiation is required, shows the close affinity between the Egyptian and Syrian Neoplatonic circles and the later Sufi brotherhoods in Islamic Syria and Egypt. To awaken the "intellectual eye" buried within us (Syn. *Ep.*137), to put our mind into a state of inspiration and contemplation of the ultimate Beauty and Goodness, is the goal of philosophizing in such communities of philosophers.

18. Philosophy and the Power of Faith: Towards the Final Union

The success of Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists was due to their adaptation of a more erudite and impersonal Platonism to contemporary aspirations for immortality and a blessed afterlife. Plato directed the philosophical vision towards the intelligible Form of the Good and the Beautiful. The Middle Platonists faithfully followed Plato's advice to imitate God as far as it is possible for a soul and to become God (*Theaet.*176 b). This assimilation to God may be understood as following, or imitating, in all respects the divine patterns (*paradeigmata*), thereby restoring the perfect image of God both externally and internally. The Stoics understood it as "life according to nature". But the more esoteric interpretation, related to the Egyptian mysteries, is concerned with actual union.

Early Christianity inherited the ancient *telos* of theurgy, though "assimilation to God" may be explained in many different ways, not always meaning making one closer to God. For Clement of Alexandria, assimilation means deification:

"The Word of God (*tou theou*) speaks, having become man, in order that you may learn from man how man may become god" (*theos: Protrep.*8.4).

It is not clear, whether *theos* here means a stage within God himself or an angelic rank. In the Biblical tradition, the sons of God may be called "angels", and "Moses calls the angels gods", according to Julian (*onomazei theous tous angellous: Kata Gallilaion logos* 290B). Perhaps Clement means that the gnostic draws nearer to God than the closest possible proximity, though this transcending never ends:

"The gnostic souls, transcending, by the magnificence of their contemplation, the citizenship (*politeia*) of every holy rank, in accordance with which [ranks] the blessed dwellings of gods, having been delimited, are allotted; having been counted as holy among the holies… arriving at better and better places; no longer cleaving to divine contemplation in mirrors or through mirrors, but hailing the most manifest possible and absolutely unmixed sight… This is the grasping contemplation (*kataleptike theoria*) of the "pure in heart" (*Stromateis* 7.13.2).

The Middle Platonist Alkinous argues that Plato "made our good the knowledge and contemplation of the first Good which can be called God and the First Intellect" (*Didask*.179.36-37). In order to comprehend such statements we must remember that prior to Plotinus no clear distinction had been established yet between the divine Intellect (or the noetic realm constituted by the triad of Being, Life, Intelligence) and the ineffable One as the first Good which transcends Intellect and Being altogether. The aim (*telos)* of philosophy for the Middle Platonist consists in assimilation to God as far as possible. If the principal activity of God (in this case equated with the Aristotelian first Intellect) is displayed in contemplating Himself, then the human *telos* should be to contemplate God. Alkinous says:

The soul contemplating the divine and the intellections of the divine can be designated as in excellent condition. Such a condition of the soul is called wisdom (*phronesis*) – in fact, one should think of assimilation to the divine as nothing else"(*Didask*.153.4-7).

The fundamental feature of the Middle Platonic metaphysics is the fusion of the Platonic conception of Ideas and the Aristotelian conception of Intellect (*nous*). In their transcendent aspect, the Ideas were considered as thoughts of God and, in the immanent aspect, they were regarded as forms of beings. The Middle Platonists recovered the Platonic dimension of incorporeality and transcendence neglected by the New Academy and posited as the supreme end of man the imitation of God, or assimilation to the divine and to the incorporeal.

Numenius, the Neopythagorean predecessor of Plotinus, upheld the doctrine close to *philosophia perennis:* he tried to show the harmony and inner concord of the Pythagorean philosophy of Plato with various initiations and doctrines (*tas teletas kai dogmata*) shared by the Brahmans, the Jews, the Magi, and the Egyptians (fr.1a). The Pythagorean Platonism expounded by Numenius and Ammonius Sakkas "a charismatic purveyor of Numenian Neopythagoreanism", according to J. Dillon,[102] exercised the most powerful influence upon Plotinus and later Platonists.

In the writings of the Alexandrian philosopher Hierocles, Ammonius emerges as having accomplished the main Numenian task (insufficiently conducted much earlier by Antiochus of Ascalon), namely, the purification and restoration of Platonism betrayed by Plato's successors in the Academy. Hierocles follows Iamblichus in regarding true philosophy as a revelation: Plato presents the earthly domain as a sort of "avataric" epiphany. Being the purifier of philosophy, Ammonius is instructed by the divine (*theodidaktos*: Photius *Bibliotheca* III.126, 172a).

According to Hierocles, the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*, described as an "educational introduction" (*paideutike stoicheiosis*) written by those who had already "ascended the divine way" contain the general and basic principles of all philosophy. By establishing the cultivation of virtues and contemplation of truth, they put the student of philosophy on the road to his final goal, namely, assimilation to God and return to the archetypal abode. Therefore repentance is the beginning of philosophy which itself is divided into "practical philosophy", that is human virtue, and "contemplative philosophy" celebrated under the name of divine virtue.

In order to restore spiritual insight proper to the primordial "golden race", to conduct the perfect and happy life full of knowledge, and to ascend to divine principles, not only various sciences, such as geometry and mathematics, are needed, but hieratic purifications of the soul's pneumatic vehicle (*ochema*) are also required. As Hierocles concludes alluding to the *Phaedrus* myth (246a-256c):

"The end of the Pythagorean philosophy is that we may become all over wings to soar aloft to the Divine Good"[103]

This Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy is based on oral and written instructions, commandments and exhortations (*parangelmata*) provided by the so-called "daimonic" men who belong to the *hermaike seira* – the Hermetic chain of transmission which is primarily vertical and only secondarily horizontal. This philosophy also is based on an elaborated symbolical exegesis, that is, on the metaphysical interpretation of oracles and certain inspired ancient texts such as the dialogues of the "divine" Plato and the poems of Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus. From the 2nd century A.D. the theological and metaphysical oracles (or "dogmas from Assyria" – *ta Assuria patria dogmata*: Procl. *In Parm.* I.647.7) were accepted as direct utterances and revelations of gods and archangels. These oracles combined with other sacred traditions, provided sufficient ground for the re-established unity of philosophy and religion.

For H. D. Saffrey, who regarded philosophy as "a mental activity which the Greeks had always laboured to render rational", this turn to the supra-rational authorities, mythical evidences and hieratic arts proves to be a clear decline. "Plotinus alone appears to us as a heroic exception to this general crazy infatuation"- he sadly concludes. However, the Pythagoreans, Neoplatonists and Chaldeans themselves regarded theurgy and other hieratic practices not as the regrettable corruption of rational philosophy, but as the desired culmination of the entire philosophical programme. The acceptance of divine revelations and myths in no way presupposes the rejection of mind, of independent scientific research and logic. Therefore Platonism presented itself as the supreme defender of Hellenic rationality. The characteristic of a philosopher and of any intelligent person was felt to be his ability to explain in logical terms what he believed and he does not indulge in vulgar and irrational abuse of natural things which are, after all, the reflections of eternal archetypes and noetic paradigms.

Despite the confidence of H. D. Saffrey and other scholars who tried to dissociate philosophy (converted into purely mental activity) from any kind of revelation and initiation, the philosophy of Plotinus is not incompatible with hieratic traditions. The Plotinian ascent (*anagoge*) as a contemplative process which brings the soul to greater and greater degrees of noetic purification, follows the model of the mysteries and of cosmogonical scenarios by imitating the rhythms of the main divine Rite – that of creative irradiation and return to the source. Since cosmogony itself is the ritual act of the Demiurge (who directs and orders the overflowing productive power of the One) both theurgy and philosophy at their proper levels constitute the soul's mimesis of the cosmogonical rite conducted in the cosmos, itself understood as the temple of the eternal gods. The ascending soul, "drunk with nectar" and filled with love for the Good, participates in Intellect's erotic supra-intellectual aspiration for the Good as pure light. Plotinus says:

"But the soul sees by a kind of confusing and annulling of the intellect which abides within it – but rather its intellect sees first and the vision comes also to it and the two become one (*kai ta duo hen ginetai*). But the Good is spread out over them and fitted in to the union of both; playing upon them and uniting the two it rests upon them and gives them a blessed perception and vision..."(*Enn.* VI.7.35.33-41).

This grasp of the ultimate Good is achieved by the soul (carried on the epistrophic wave of the divine *Nous* itself) through the "prime part of intellect" or "that element in *nous* which is not *nous*" but is akin to the One. This "element" is the same as the "flame of intellect" or "flower of intellect" (*anthous nou*) of the *Chaldean Oracles* – the most mysterious part of the intellect which is akin to the fiery essence of the Father. Sometimes the language of Chaldean theology is strikingly close to the language of Plotinus' negative theology and dialectic. And when they show certain differences in metaphysical detail, in style of expression and spiritual method, they nonetheless agree regarding the aim of *anagoge* which is the same: mystical vision, illumination, immortality and union with the eternal divine principles or the One which should be described not only as an object of love but also as the lover and the love itself.

Active union with divine principles is accomplished not without intellect and rational abilities. But at the same time this union transcends imagination, discursive thought and even intellect itself. The strength of human intelligence suffices for gaining the vision of Ideas in their noetic union of plurality, but not of their source – the supreme and ineffable God. Therefore immaterial theurgy, regarded as the graceful interference of the henads themselves, at the summit of philosophical ascent provides a supra-rational and supra-intellectual union.

The different kinds of theurgy operate on different levels of reality. Material theurgy employs material objects, because the corporeal world is a field in which the soul's faculties are developed and tested. Therefore theurgy reveals the sacramental virtues and qualities of phenomena which serve as the unspeakable symbols and ineffable names of the gods. As G. Shaw pointed out:

"The soul could no more realize its salvation without embracing matter than the Demiurge could have created the cosmos without the formless receptacle".[104]

The aporetic approach to philosophy based on reasoned arguments and logic of the lower stages of ascent is not incompatible with the noetic insights and mystical visions of the higher stages. Though our language and thought are unable to reach the One's ineffable light, philosophy ultimately attains the truth and is able to assimilate us to the divine realm. A. H. Armstrong, the great Plotinian scholar, says:

"An important reason why there is so little about prayer in the *Enneads* of Plotinus is that so much of what he writes simply is prayer, understood according to its admirable catechism definition as 'lifting up the head and mind to God'".[105]

Plotinus distinguishes three classes of men: 1) those who do not attempt to rise above the physical realm, 2) those who try but cannot, and 3) those who succeed and arrive at the divine realm, "just as a man arrives in his well-governed land after a long journey" *(Enn.* V.9.1.20-21). Here Odysseus is a symbol of the highest class of humanity – those philosophers and mystics who have reached their spiritual Home. Being faithful to Plato's definition (*Phaed.*67c), both Plotinus and Porphyry regarded philosophy essentially as a preparation for death and escaping from the physical body.

But whereas Plato describes the process of doing good to one's beloved as "working on a statue" (*agalma tektainetai: Phaedr.*252d7), Plotinus exhorts the searcher for the Good to go on working at his own statue (*tektainon to son agalma*: *Enn.* I.6.9.13). Porphyry also proclaims the necessity of returning to the real Self. Since the real Self for Plotinus and Porphyry is the "undescending intellect", both as the highest element in us and as a component of the hypostasis of Intellect, the goal of life is to live according to intellect, following the Aristotelian maxim (*Nicom. Eth.*118ab). Porphyry says:

"To the extent to which you approach yourself (and yet you are present to yourself and inseparable from yourself) you approach Being as well" (*Sent.*40).

He indicates four "elements" (*stoicheia),* derived from Chaldean sources, as significant and indispensable for the friend of God, that is, faith, truth, love, and hope (*Ad Marcellam* 24). As Porphyry argues, it is necessary to trust that the only salvation (*soteria*) is conversion to God (*he pros ton theon epistrophe*) and knowing the truth about Him. Through toil and steadfastness philosophy accomplishes the blessed journey to Heaven following the example of the Dioscuri, Heracles, Asclepius, and "all other children of the gods" (*Ad Marcellam* 7).

Both Neoplatonists and Hermetists maintain that the only really useful knowledge is that of the way of immortality. Though the idea that one may know God (common in Christian usage) is rare among Hellenic writers, for Iamblichus liberation from fate occurs only through knowledge of the gods (*tou theou gnosis: De myster.* 290.16-17). This knowledge is sometimes equated to union with the gods and is viewed as "the first road to happiness".

In Neoplatonism, a spiritual master is described as the "divine man" (*theios aner*) which may be regarded as a personification of divine Intellect. Within the elaborated hierarchy of virtues, the agent of theoretic virtue (the soul which beholds *nous* within itself and is fulfilled by it) is given the title "god" and that of the paradigmatic virtue (the soul which is united with Intellect) – "father of gods", according to Porphyry (*Sent.*32). Following another view, more suited to Iamblichean and post-Iamblichean Platonism, the possessor of philosophical virtue is called "god" (*theos*) and the possessor of theurgical virtue (the liberated soul which is united to the One or resembles it) is called "father of gods" (Psellus *De omnifaria doctrina* 55). Theurgical, or hieratic, virtue is proper to the henadic element of the soul which transcends Intellect and Being.

Each soul, likened to a fruit-producing plant by Iamblichus (Stob. I.373.15), must worship the gods in a manner appropriate to its nature and level of understanding. There are various modes (*tropoi*) both of descent and ascent, therefore philosophy (not love of talking but love of wisdom) leads upwards by using all necessary means. For philosophy indeed is the science of living perfectly, according to Iamblichus.

The true philosophical life (*philosophikos bios*) is also the life of loving (*erotikos bios*), for philosophy is the love of wisdom and its goal is the knowledge of all divine things, according to Proclus. Being as it were the benefactor of souls and bringing salvation to mankind, philosophy leads the soul upward by the power of truth – to the unparticipated divine Intellect and eternal Ideas.[106] Platonic dialectic serves this function, namely, to unify the whole realm of human reasoning and proceed from human reason to the divine *Nous* itself. Since the vision of the Ideas (Archetypes, divine Names) is among the most important achievements in the upward journey, the soul of the philosopher is rewarded by that life of contemplation known as the Cronian life (*kronios bios*). Standing at the top of Heaven (on the back of the Egyptian goddess Nut), the soul contemplates the true Being beyond. Philosophy and the power of truth cannot lead further, but only *theourgike techne* and faith. In this respect, which concerns the relationship between philosophy and faith (consisting of being aware of metaphysical depths of reality) F. Schuon asserts as follows:

"One can spend a whole lifetime speculating on the supersensorial and the transcendent, but all that matters is the "leap into the void" which is the fixation of spirit and soul in an unthinkable dimension of the real; this leap, which cuts short and completes in itself the endless chain of formulations, depends on a direct understanding and on a grace, not on having reached a certain phase in the unfolding of the doctrine, for this unfolding, we repeat, has logically no end. This "leap into the void" we can call "faith"; it is the negation of this reality that is the source of all philosophy of the type that may be described as "art for art's sake", and of all thought that believes it can attain to an absolute contact with Reality by means of analyses, syntheses, arrangements, filtrations, and polishings…"[107]

While discussing the power of faith (*pistis*) Proclus argues in the same vein:

"For the theologians call the contact and union with the One faith" (*kai he pros auto sunaphe kai henosis hupo ton theologon pistis pokaleitai*).[108]

Paradoxically, this faith may be defined as "illegitimate belief" (*nothe doxa*), being like the Buddhist *upaya*, a kind of "soteriological mirage". Since like is always known by like, the theologians can know the One only by an illegitimate intuition (*nothos nous*). The soul is united with the Good (which is unknowable and unspeakable) through the "flower of the intellect" (*anthos tou nou*) and the "flower of our whole soul" (*pases hemon tes psuches anthos*). The final unity is called the "fire-brand of the soul" (*psuches pursos*). Proclus argues that Plato and the theologians before Plato were accustomed to praise a "divine madness" (*mania*) which transcends intellect:

"For the soul must become one in order to see the One, or rather in order not to see the One; for if it saw the One it would do so by intuition and not by that which is above intuition (*videns enim intellectuale videbit et non supra-intellectum*), and it would know a particular unitary thing, but not the One itself" (*Prov. Fato* IV.171-172).

L. J. Rosan distinguishes three stages of this madness: 1) contact (*sunaphe*), 2) approach (*empelasis*), and 3) union (*henosis*). The final union may be described as "becoming Fire" and the road to it as the fiery road, leading to the Father. Those terms reflect not only Chaldean, but also Egyptian images, such as the entourage of flame in the solar barque of Ra. Proclus says:

"Now that we are coming close to the Cause of all things, there must be not only a hush of the opinion, a hush of the imagination, and a cessation of all emotions that prevent us from rising upward to the One, but also a stillness in the air and a stillness of all else. For let all things lead us by the calmness of their power to the presence of the Ineffable. And standing There raised above all that which has being, we kneel to It as to the Rising Sun, blinded in our eyes".[109]

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1. On the Back of the Heavenly Cow

O man, what should we do? This question is raised by Porphyry the Phoenician, the disciple of Plotinus. The following answer is given:

"We should imitate those that lived in the golden age" (*De abst.* III.27).

This presupposes a fall of humankind from a paradisiacal "golden" condition and separation from the gods. According to the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* which originated in the New Kingdom Egypt (circa 1350 B.C.) and provides a paradigm for later Gnostic and Hermetic teachings about redemption, the rebellion of humankind against the Sun god Ra (the demiurgic Intellect) resulted in its punishment by the fiery Eye of Ra, the goddess Hathor. This fall and subsequent rebellion re-ordered the world which had previously been in a golden age: the original paradise was thus lost, strife and death came into the world, and Ra himself withdrew to the sky on the back of the celestial Cow. This macrocosmic Cow, sometimes regarded as Nut-Hathor, is supported by Shu and the eight Heh-gods, or by the Pharaoh himself who symbolizes the golden Horus, the perfect imago dei.

After this fatal separation had occurred, all aspirations of human beings (at least of those who may be described as lovers of wisdom) were directed back towards the original unity, on the re-establishing of this golden age inwardly through recollection, purification, devotion, love and spiritual knowledge. Since Pharaoh is a son and successor of Ra, he imitates the withdrawal of his Father who, as it were, shows the theurgic way upwards. Therefore the king and every initiate should live and "philosophize" according to the example provided by Ra, that is Intellect. They also must ascend on the back of the heavenly Cow (a sort of *ochema*) and reach the intelligible realm.

Those who ascend to the abode of Ra, lead a blessed life in the "entourage of flames" until the final re-absorbtion and return to the primeval Waters (Nun) at "the end of time". This is the initial and rather "archaic" version of the Aristotelian maxim to live according to Intellect (*bios kata noun: Nicomach. Eth.*118a6). The human *telos* consists in self-realization and deification: the actualized human intellect grasps that in its very nature the human being is of the same essence (*homoousios*) as the divine Intellect. At the end of his *via dialectica* the perfect philosopher sees noetically the entire *kosmos*, himself being the son of Ra, i.e., the son of the ever-living and eternally active *Nous* which energizes the microcosmic *nous*, potentially hidden in each human soul.

At least from the New Kingdom (1550-1070 B.C.), the Egyptian intellectual milieu developed the proto-Hermetic and proto-Neoplatonic strand (if such a paradoxical statement is permissible), providing sophisticated and detailed conceptions 1) of the unity of the cosmos, regarded as theophany, 2) of the ontological hierarchy constituting vertical chains of manifestation (theology of *ba*, according to which various deities, sacred animals, and symbols are *bau* of other deities at different levels of being), 3) of a single God whose real name (*ren*) and nature remains secret even from the gods. He is both transcendent and immanent, "one and all" (*hen kai pan*). He takes all forms of the universe, is hidden in the multiplicity of things, yet his own form is inconceivable: "no god knows his true form", "no one knows his essence" (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.200).

Though so-called polytheistic mythologies from the earliest times were only the symbolic veils of the single metaphysical Principle, displayed at the level of cultic imagination and social life (thus constituting the set of precedents, models, examples and ideals for the whole state and its inhabitants, serving for their spiritual education and meaningful conduct), the monistic tendency of thought was reinforced at the beginning of New Kingdom Egypt. This mythological, metaphysical, and hermeneutical monism which reached its culmination in the theology of Amun-Ra, is the direct predecessor of the much later Hellenic metaphysics.

The concept of the divine of the Ramesside period (1295-1069 B.C.) stands at the roots of Hermetic lore which partly moulded the entire Western esoteric tradition. A large majority of the initiation rituals and mystical aspirations have their semi-forgotten or hidden prototype in ancient Egypt. The Ramesside theologians, who laid the foundation for the much later developed Pythagorean and Platonic metaphysics, regarded Amun-Ra as "the only one", "one who has no second", "the solitary sole one". The sacred metaphysics of Amun-Ra, shaped by the iconographically correct divine images, symbols, words of power and abstract conceptions, provides a model and paradigm for the later monistic theologies.

Thomas McEvilley views the transcendent aspect of Amun-Ra which surpasses form, thought, and name as "the direct ancestor of primal philosophical conceptions such as Parmenides' formless Being and the featureless absolute *brahman* of Yajnavalkya. The idea of the immanent-transcendent absolute, which would become a central conception of the early stage of metaphysics in both Greece and India, is first recorded in this late mythological context".[1]

Since the term "pantheism" is inaccurate if used without reservations and rather sophisticated explanations, we avoid speaking of "Egyptian pantheism" which supposedly merges the gods and goddesses into a single "cosmic being". It is the common idea of the Egyptian theological texts that all gods are fundamentally manifestations or hypostases of another superior god, and ultimately of the ineffable Principle itself. The unspeakable fullness and transcendence of the one God cannot be diminished, damaged or exhausted by the fact that He reveals himself in millions of forms and names.

A name can express only one aspect of a god's (*ntr*) complex nature and no image shows the true form of god: therefore a variety of iconographies and mythologies is inevitable. Since the gods (sometimes equated to *bau*, initially perhaps meaning fame and glory, and *sekhemu*, powers, symbols of the supreme God) are "rich in manifestations" and characterized by the multiplicity of faces (*hrw*), every hieratic image of them is only an imperfect means (though, presumably, introduced by the gods themselves) of making a god visible and distinguishing him from other *neteru*.

Hence, divineness or sacredness is regarded as an irradiation produced by the gods, their images, and manifestations. Behind every name and every epithet stand not only certain particular myths and cultic liturgies, directed to individual deities, but also the simultaneously immanent and transcendent *pantheos*, the All-lord. This concept cannot be simply regarded as a transitional stage between mythology and philosophy, or "a mythology undergoing meltdown" which was later encountered by Thales, Pythagoras and other seekers of wisdom who explored and reinterpreted the ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, and Mesopotamian traditions.

However, it is nonetheless evident that the early philosophers in Greece and India continued "the final preoccupation of Bronze Age mythology: the Problem of the One and the Many, with solutions that emphasize the One over the Many, and the investigation of the relationship between immanence and transcendence, or form and formless".[2]

Egyptian mythical theology concerns the relationship between the One and the Many, the One and the Ennead, the One and different levels of *kosmos noetos*, including all further manifestations. It tries to assert that diversity is contained within a higher unity, that material images are reflections of immaterial archetypes. The symbolic connections between the macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions are also established, since Ptah, as a Cosmic Person, serves as a paradigm to his pious follower who strives to become a "Perfect Man", Macranthropos, and thus "imitates" Ptah, playing the role of his son Nefertum, or the sage Imhotep.

However, we cannot accept the straightforward opinion of certain modern historians that the ideas described above, and others like them, were innovations of New Kingdom solar theologies, since they appeared (or were announced in public) owing to shifts of emphasis and interpretation. The long tradition and inherited scheme of things stand behind them, and the religiously inspired, or revealed, monism complex seems to be the central metaphysical concern of the ancient, otherwise "polytheistic", civilizations. Most of the New Kingdom teachings are based on Old Kingdom doctrines, and some of them are hidden esoteric teachings revealed to a wider audience or put in writing after the Amarna upheaval for fear of their loss. Therefore we can speak of a great new synthesis and development of the old priestly tradition which reflects and repeats another great synthesis (sometimes regarded as the Sumero-Egyptian syncretic strain of Near Eastern cultural influences) accomplished by the priestly and scholarly community of the early Old Kingdom. According to T. MacEvilley:

"This Bronze Age synthesis cast all the universe in a mathematical-astronomical-musical unity, within which temporal years generate diversity and articulation".[3]

He argues that such texts as the Orphic poem which describes the macranthropic Zeus and the macranthropic hymns which describe the universe as a giant human body and appear in the Xth book of the *Rig Veda* (c.1000 B.C.) have parallels in the earlier Akkadian examples, but in their terms and structure go back ultimately to Old Kingdom Egyptian texts. Concerning the Amun-Ra theology of the Ramesside Age, he says:

"Egyptian influences seem to have been flowing into both the Greek and the Indian streams of early philosophical thought. Egyptian mythologems... control the afterlife myth of the Orphics and of an Upanishadic text. Egyptian New Kingdom pantheism is the closest parallel to early Indian monism; the Amon-Ra hymns gave birth ultimately to both the pantheistic Orphic hymns and the *Purushasukta*, and something like reincarnation did in fact exist in Egyptian thought".[4]

2. Proteus and Egyptian Wisdom

Multi-facetted Egyptian wisdom was likened to Proteus by the Greeks who were able to glimpse only certain sides and aspects of it. Proteus, who could assume any form whatsoever and whose inner essence escapes the curious eye of inquiry, is connected with Egypt in the *Odyssey* of Homer and called an "Egyptian sophist" by Plato. Proclus regarded him as an angelic *nous* in the procession (*seira*) of Poseidon. Proteus "contains" in himself "the forms of all things in the world" (*ta eide panta ton geneton: In Remp.* I.112.28-29).

We may extend this interpretation and suppose that countless theological and iconographical varieties employed by the Egyptian mythoplasts (creators of myths) really illustrate the fact that a fragmented embodied soul cannot perceive these forms simultaneously, but only according to one or another *upaya*, one or another hermeneutical perspective. Since apparitions of gods appearing in various forms to different people imply no change in the gods themselves, the differences of receivers (*hupodochai*) and their capacities produce the Protean multiplicity of visions. While defending Homer against the Socratic accusation, Proclus explains the story of Proteus (*Od.* IV.351-582) in a similar vein, arguing:

"But there is also a second mode in which the divine itself, because of its multiple powers and because it is filled with forms of all sorts, extends diverse visions to those who observe it. Here, in effect, the poem is showing the diversity of the powers and again says that that which contains all these powers itself changes into many forms (*eis pollas morphas*), projecting first one then another, though in fact the being in question is always acting according to all its powers, but because of the multiplicity of the powers it encompasses it is constantly changing for the discursive perceptions of souls" (*In Remp.* I.112.14-22).

According to the popular legend related by Heliodorus (*Aethiopica* III.14), Homer himself was a son of Hermes Trismegistus, conceived by the wife of a priest while she slept in a temple of Thebes. Another story tells us that Homer, who described the celestial Nile, Osiris, as "the water of the Egyptian river falling down from Heaven" (*Od.* IV.477), received the manuscript of the *Iliad* in Memphis.

The opinion that Homeric wisdom is related to Egypt was prevalent in late antiquity and Byzantium. The idea is not purely fantastical but reflects the close historical relations between Hellenes and Egyptians, renewed and strengthened from the 7th century B.C. onward, "that is, one hundred years before the conventional beginning of philosophy in the 6th century B.C."[5] Close contacts between Egyptians and Phoenicians point to an even older cultural encounter. Through the Phoenician traders, colonists, craftsmen, and sages the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Akkadian concepts were spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

Therefore it seems unsound to think that the Hellenic tradition, which insists on the birth of Greek philosophy as a consequence of the encounter with Egyptian civilization, is utterly wrong. Isocrates, the contemporary of Plato, is not simply "idealizing" Egyptian philosophy as the origin of all philosophy or creating this trustworthy account *ex nihilo* in order to make a surrealist picture and fabricate an incredible fiction against the expected self-estimation of the Hellenes. Diodorus of Sicily (c.80-20 B.C.), partly drawing on the lost work of Hecateus of Abdera (c.300 B.C.), is even more drastic: he says that the gods and goddesses originated in Egypt (*Bibl. hist.* I.9.6).

Among the visitors to and disciples of the Egyptian priests Heliodorus of Halicarnassus (c.484-425 B.C.) enumerates Orpheus, Musaeus, Homer, Lycurgus, followed by Solon, Pythagoras, Plato, Eudoxus, Democritus, Oenopides of Chios (*Hist.* I.96). Plutarch, who describes the Egyptian priests and "their philosophy, which for the most part, is veiled in myths and in words containing dim reflections and adumbrations of the truth", thus being "an enigmatic sort of wisdom" (*hos ainigmatode sophian: De Iside* 354c), relates as follows:

"When they, therefore, address the supreme God (*ton proton theon*), whom they believe to be the same as the Universe (*to panti*), as if he were invisible and concealed, and implore him to make himself visible and manifest to them, they use the word 'Amun' (*Amoun legousin*); so great, then, was the circumspection of the Egyptians in their wisdom touching all that had to do with the gods (*ta theia sophias*).

"Witness to this also are the wisest of the Hellenes: Solon, Thales, Plato, Eudoxus, Pythagoras, who came to Egypt and consorted with the priests; and in this number some would include Lycurgus also. Eudoxus, they say, received instruction from Chonuphis of Memphis, Solon from Sonchis of Sais, and Pythagoras from Oenuphis of Heliopolis. Pythagoras, as it seems, was greatly admired, and he also greatly admired the Egyptian priests, and, copying their symbolism and mystical teachings (*to sumbolikon auton kai musteriodes*), incorporated his doctrines in enigmas (*ainigmasi*). As a matter of fact most of the Pythagorean precepts do not at all fall short of the writings that are called hieroglyphs…

"For my part, I think also that their naming unity (*monada*) Apollo, duality (*duada)* Artemis, the hebdomad Athena, and the first cube Poseidon, bears a resemblance to the statues and even to the sculptures and paintings with which their shrines are embellished. For their King and Lord Osiris they portray by means of an eye and a sceptre; there are even some who explain the meaning of the name as 'many-eyed' on the theory that *os* in the Egyptian language means 'many' and *iri* 'eye'; and the heavens, since they are ageless because of their eternity, they portray by a heart with a censer beneath" (*De Iside* 9-10.354d-355a).

The Romans, for example, the prefect Titus Claudius Balbilus, who otherwise showed only contempt for the "vanity" of the Egyptian royal buildings, nonetheless, believed that the obelisks contain a description of the nature of things (*rerum naturae*), "according to the philosophy of the Egyptians" (Pliny *Nat. hist.*71). Putting aside the question regarding formation of these legends and the particular Roman point of view or interpretation of "exotic cultures", we ought to observe that even such a careful and sometimes sceptical writer as E. Hornung is ready to acknowledge that the philosopher Democritus, viewed also as a magus, "borrowed from Egyptians concepts of the afterlife, and the tradition of such compositions as the Books of the Netherworld did in fact extend down into the Ptolemic Period. Democritus fits in with hermetic tradition, because he viewed man as a microcosm".[6]

3. Allegorical Myths and Philosophy in the Temples

The widespread opinion, which states that when the ancients with the guidance of the gods had discovered the hidden meaning of things they clothed them in paradoxical myths, reflects the rationalist attitude of post-Socratic Hellenism. From the metaphysical point of view, ordinary men and those uninitiated into the mysteries do not derive most benefit from the sacred myths which instruct through symbols alone, unlike the initiates themselves who use these symbols and images as a tool of contemplation.

The myths and images with their underlying metaphysics are symbolic constructs whereby what is invisible, ineffable, and immaterial is represented as visible, hearable, and material. The images along with the verbal evocations (mantras, divine names, words of power) served as objects of meditation which allowed initiates to invoke the deity's presence during the sacrificial ritual and inner liturgy. The mythical images presented in the imagination should be judged by their correspondence to their noetic models. Therefore, according to Proclus:

"Even more divine than the figures of souls are the intelligible figures; they are in every way superior to divided things, shining everywhere with indivisible and intelligible light, generating, effecting, perfecting all things, being present equally in all of them though themselves steadfast and unmoved, bringing unity to the figures of souls and keeping the aberrations of sensible figures within appropriate bounds. And high above all these are the perfect, uniform, unknowable, and ineffable figures of the gods which, being mounted on the intelligible figures, impose limits upon the whole universe of figures and hold everything together in their unifying boundaries. Their properties have been represented for us by the theurgic art in its statues of the gods, whom it clothes in the most varied figures. Some of them it portrays by means of mystic signs that express the unknowable divine potencies, others it represents through forms and shapes, making some standing, others sitting; some heart-shaped, some spherical, and some fashioned still otherwise; some simple, others composed of several shapes; some stern, others mild and expressing the benignity of the gods; and still others fearful in shape. To these figures it adjoins various symbols for different gods, as they are appropriate to the divinities represented" (*In Euclid.*137-138).

Egyptian thought represents the multi-levelled, but logically coherent system of symbolism to a degree rarely surpassed by other cultures. Therefore it cannot be fully comprehended without knowing how to read and interpret the texts and images – not only a "temple grammar", but also a semiotic structure of the symbolic and emblematic reality itself which includes a complex hierarchy of gods and humans.

Tzetzes, the Byzantine commentator on Homer, maintains that the chief reason why "the most ancient of the sacred scribes (*hoi archaioteroi ton hierogrammateon*) wanted to conceal the theory about the nature of the gods" (*ton peri theon phusikon logon*), is that of the education and instruction of children. This rather incorrect attitude derives from the Hellenistic *paideia*, based on one-sided rationalistic ideas about reality, and from Stoic philosophical hermeneutics which tried to present ancient myths as the deliberate allegories of their "scientific" materialism. Maintaining that the

Egyptians wanted to teach the lofty things to the uninitiated "by means of allegories and myths" (*di' allegorion kai muthon: Exegesis of the Iliad.* I.193) or "by allegorical symbols and characters" (ibid. I.97), Tzetzes follows the Alexandrian *hierogrammateus* Chaeremon, who was both an Egyptian priest and a Stoic philosopher, serving as tutor to the Roman Prince Nero.

According to the usual Stoic interpretation, the ancient myths speak allegorically (*allegorikos*), therefore the aim of philosophical hermeneutics is to find the hidden meaning (*huponoia*). They were correct in admitting that Egyptian theology used symbolic means of expression, but wrong in their supposition that the hidden meaning would necessarily be in accord with their own rather "modern" speculations about the nature of things.

Aristotle also listed "theological philosophy" (*theologike*) among the types of "contemplative philosophy" (*theoretikai: Metaph.* E 1026a19), referring to "those very ancient people who lived long before the present age and were the first to theologize" (*protous theologisantes*: ibid.,A 983b 28-29). By "theologizing" he probably meant not only creating myths and writing poetry in which information about the gods was presented in a veiled form, but also interpreting them, providing commentaries and explanations.

In the 1st century A.D., the geographer Strabo summarizes the Stoic conception of theology and hermeneutics, developed in the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C., as follows:

"Every discussion of the gods [i.e., all theology] is built upon the examination of opinions and myths (*exetazei doxas kai muthous*), since the ancients hinted at their physical perceptions about things and always added a mythical element to their discussions (*tois logois ton muthon*). It is not an easy thing to solve all the riddles (*ta ainigmata*) correctly, but when the whole mass of mythically expressed material is placed before you, some of it in agreement and some in contradiction with the rest, then you might more easily be able to form from it an image of the truth" (*Geogr.*10.3.23).

The Stoics never questioned the existence of Egyptian philosophy as such, i.e., they never doubted that the Egyptian priests were "philosophers" and masters of the early Hellenic sages. Chaeremon the Stoic tells us (though his writings are preserved only in citations of later authors) that the Egyptian priests are considered as philosophers and they chose the temples as the place to philosophize. Those men devoted their life to contemplation and the shrines were regarded as the best places for this task. They were always seen near the statues of the gods, either preceding them in processions or setting them up with order and dignity, so that each act they performed was not an empty gesture, but an indication of some allegorical truth (*phusikou logou*). All people honoured those true philosophers as if they were a sort of sacred animal.

This information, though regularly treated with contempt by modern sceptics, is preserved by Porphyry in his extant treatise *On Abstinence from Animal Food.* Taking these testimonies seriously, we will now provide selected excerpts from this book translated by Thomas Taylor the Platonist (1758-1835).

4. Porphyry *De abstinentia* IV. 6-9

"Chaeremon, the Stoic, therefore, in his narration of the Egyptian priests, who, he says, were considered by the Egyptians as philosophers, informs us, that they chose temples, as the places in which they might philosophize. For to dwell with the statues of the Gods is a thing allied to the whole desire, by which the soul tends to the contemplation of their divinities. And from the divine veneration indeed, which was paid to them through dwelling in temples, they obtained security, all men honouring these philosophers, as if they were certain sacred animals. They also led a solitary life, as they only mingled with other men in solemn sacrifices and festivals. But at other times the priests were almost inaccessible to any who wished to converse with them. For it was requisite that he who approached to them should be first purified, and abstain from many things; and this is as it were a common sacred law respecting the Egyptian priests. But these [philosophic priests], having relinquished every other employment, and human labours, gave up the whole of their life to the contemplation and worship of divine natures and to divine inspiration; through the latter, indeed, procuring for themselves, honour, security, and piety; but through contemplation, science; and through both, a certain occult exercise of manners, worthy of antiquity. For to be always conversant with divine knowledge and inspiration, removes those who are so from all avarice, suppresses the passions, and excites to an intellectual life".

"For the sanctuary was inaccessible to those who were not purified, and they dwelt in holy places for the purpose of performing divine works; but at all other times they associated more freely with those who lived like themselves. They did not, however, associate with any one who was not a religious character. But they were always seen near to the Gods, or the statues of the Gods, the latter of which they were beheld either carrying, or preceding in a sacred procession, or disposing in an orderly manner, with modesty and gravity; each of which operations was not the effect of pride, but an indication of some physical reason."

"But they always kept their hands within their garments. Each likewise bore about him a symbol indicative of the order which he was allotted in sacred concerns; for there were many orders of priests."

"When also the time arrived in which they were to perform something pertaining to the sacred rites of religion, they spent some days in preparatory ceremonies, some indeed forty-two, but others a greater, and others a lesser number of days; yet never less than seven days; and during this time they abstained from all animals, and likewise from all pot-herbs and leguminous substances, and, above all, from a venereal connexion with women; for they never at any time had connexion with males. They likewise washed themselves with cold water thrice every day…"

"They bore therefore many burdens in the performance of sacred operations, and accomplished many ministrant works, which required more than common strength. But they divided the night into the observation of the celestial bodies, and sometimes devoted a part of it to offices of purification; and they distributed the day into the worship of the Gods, according to which they celebrated them with hymns thrice or four times, viz. in the morning and evening, when the sun is at his meridian altitude, and when he is declined to the west. The rest of their time they devoted to arithmetical and geometrical speculations, always labouring to effect something, and to make some new discovery, and, in short, continully exercising their skill. In winter nights also they were occupied in the same employments, being vigilantly engaged in literary pursuits…"

"The true method of philosophizing, likewise, was preserved by the prophets, by the *hierostolistae,* and the sacred scribes, and also by the *horologi,* or calculators of nativities. But the rest of the priests, and of the *pastophori,* curators of temples, and ministers of the Gods, were similarly studious of purity, yet not so accurately, and with such great continence, as the priests of whom we have been speaking. And such are the particulars which are narrated of the Egyptians, by a man who was a lover of truth, and an accurate writer, and who among the Stoics strenuously and solidly philosophized."

"But the Egyptian priests, through the proficiency which they made by this exercise, and similitude to divinity, knew that divinity does not pervade through man alone, and that soul is not enshrined in man alone on the earth, but that it nearly passes through all animals. On this account, in fashioning the images of the Gods, they assumed every animal, and for this purpose mixed together the human form and the forms of wild beasts, and again the bodies of birds with the body of a man".

"For they venerated the power of God which extends to all things through animals which are nurtured together, and which each of the Gods imparts. They also reverenced water and fire the most of all elements, as being the principal causes of our safety. And these things are exhibited by them in temples, for even now, on opening the sanctuary of Serapis, the worship is performed through fire and water; he who sings the hymns making a libation with water, and exhibiting fire, when, standing on the threshold of the temple, he invokes the God in the language of the Egyptians".

"And farther still, the Egyptian priests, from their transcendent wisdom and association with divinity, discovered what animals are more acceptable to the Gods [when dedicated to them] than man. Thus they found a hawk is dear to the sun, since the whole of its nature consists of blood and spirit".

"In a similar manner, the Egyptians philosophize about the ram, the crocodile, the vulture, and the ibis, and, in short, about every animal; so that, from their wisdom and transcendent knowledge of divine concerns, they came at length to venerate all animals".

5. Sacred Animals, Philosophers, and Cosmic Numbers

Speaking about Egyptian philosophy as it is attested by Chaeremon the Stoic, Porphyry emphasizes that the priests on the basis of their wisdom (*phroneseos*) and their profound theosophy (*theosophias*) came to worship even animals, not believing them to be gods but making them the images and symbols of the gods (*eikonas de epoiounto kai sumbola tauta theon*). In fact, as noted above, the philosophers themselves, who devoted their whole life to contemplation and vision of the divine (*ton theion theoria kai theasei*), were regarded as a kind of sacred animals.

Hellenes and Romans rarely understood the real meaning of "honouring sacred animals" and ridiculed such practices. It must be remembered that in spite of the permanent fame as the land of spiritual masters, philosophers, mystagogues of ancient mysteries, and magicians, even the Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt stood a bit aside from the rest of the eastern Mediterranean world. The Egyptian hieratic culture was quite uncharacteristic of the Graeco-Roman world, because it preserved the unbroken, though slightly transformed, tradition from the earliest Dynasties which, in the form of religious practices, liturgies, official ritual expertise, oracles, literary genres, patterns of thought, continued well into the 4th century A.D., proving that the temple cult was not a "sheer formalism", but a means of transformation, ritualization of the environment, and theurgic ascent, keeping at the same time the dynamic rhythms of the magnificent cosmic order.

Bearing in mind this continuous functioning of the literate temple culture and maintaining religious practices even at the local level with little overall formal change, D. Frankfurter contrasts this constant tradition covering several millennia with "the comparatively briefer or less unilinear histories of Greece, Palestine, and Asia Minor with their great vicissitudes of religious centralization".[7]

Plutarch, otherwise really an admirer of the Egyptian customs, calls a "sheer superstition" the "silly" Egyptian practices in doing service to animals themselves and treating them as gods. He warns against presumption that having a beard and wearing a coarse cloak makes one a philosopher, or dressing in linen and shaving the hair, an initiate of Isis:

"The true initiate of Isis (*Isiakos*) is he who, when he has legitimately received what is set forth in the rituals connected with these gods, uses reason in philosophizing and in investigating (*logo zeton kai philosophon*) the truth contained therein" (*De Iside* 3.352c).

Since the ritual practices and myths are inseparable from "philosophizing", rational investigation, and exegesis, Plutarch regards the current fable, namely, that the gods in fear of Typhon (Seth) changed themselves into animals, concealing themselves in the bodies of ibises, dogs, and falcons, as an insufficient explanation and a play of fancy. However, he accepts the idea that animals may be viewed from the standpoint of their usefulness and symbolism. In this respect he mentions the asp, the weasel, and the beetle, honoured by the Egyptians and observing in them "certain dim likeness of the power of the gods, like images of the sun in drops of water" (ibid., 74.380f-381a).

The crocodile, for example, is declared to be a living representation (*mimema*) of God. As the only creature without a tongue he resembles the divine Word (*ho theios logos*) who has no need of a voice. The crocodile also symbolizes the First God (*to proto theo sumbebeken*), because he "can see without being seen" and has other marvellous qualities.

However, the most interesting is Plutarch's remark which shows that the Egyptians discerned a certain hidden geometrical structure of manifested reality, occasionally revealed by sacred animals who are the teachers of men in this respect. Plutarch says:

"The most strict of the priests take their lustral water for purification from a place where the ibis has drunk: for she does not drink water if it is unwholesome or tainted, nor will she approach it. By the spreading of her feet, in their relation to each other and to her bill, she makes an equilateral triangle" (*isopleuron poiei trigonon*: ibid., 75.381d).

Then Plutarch straightforwardly turns towards the Pythagoreans who "embellished also numbers and figures (*arithmous kai schemata*) with the appellations of the gods" and this can only mean that such practices were common among the Egyptian priests. Though we cannot actually speak of an advanced quantitative mathematics or certain "positivistic" knowledge, later forgotten, the symbolic numerology or mystical metaphysical use of numbers stand at the roots of their "architectural" civilization.

The Egyptian theologians saw the relationship between similar words or objects not as merely coincidental, but as a reflection of divine order, archetypal design, and hidden meaning in the world produced by God, namely, Ptah, who "always geometrizes", as Plato used to say. According to R. Guenon, divine activity, conceived as producing and ordering the cosmos, is assimilated to geometry and architecture which are inseparable. He argues that these conceptions have been transmitted by the Pythagoreans (Pythagoreanism itself being only an "adaptation" of earlier initiatic traditions).[8]

For the Egyptians, the number one appears as a symbol of the supreme deity, or deities who are described in terms of their unique importance and "oneness", especially in the sense of cosmogonical Monad. This is a source of the Pythagorean and Neoplatonic concept of the One. Plutarch relates that for the Pythagoreans the number one means Apollo (initially from Akkadian *abullu*, Aramaic *abul*, "city gate"), because of its rejection of plurality and because of the singleness of unity (*plethous apophasei kai di' kaploteta tes monados*). The equilateral triangle they call Athena, born from the head and third-born, because it is divided by three perpendiculars drawn from its three angles (*De Iside* 75.381f).

For the Egyptian priests, just as verbal and visual puns were felt to reflect an important aspect of reality, the relationships between the numbers used in myth, liturgy, sacred art and the surrounding cosmos were seen as meaningful patterns of divine providence, planning, and immanent eidetic order (*maat*). Therefore these underlying patterns are referred to as "mysteries" by the *Bremner-Rhind Papyrus*, as R. H. Wilkinson pointed out.[9]

Of course, the divine (*to theion*) is not engendered in colours (*en chroais*), in shapes, or figures (*en schemasin*), or in polished surfaces (*en leiotesin*), as Plutarch states. However, they may serve as qualitative symbols in the hierarchy of "divine semiotics". If the divine represented in animals is not of a lesser order than that in works of bronze and stone, i.e. hieratic statues, and if things alive are more honourable than those that are dead, it seems that a lover of wisdom, becoming like a sacred animal, really becomes the perfect living (*ankh*) image (*tut*) of God: he is in a sense divinized and functions as an intermediary between the two realms – noetic and sensible. He is a son of the solar *Nous*, or Intellect, and, accordingly, contemplates the sensible realities as theophanies, sacred receptacles, and bodies, animated by the noetic rays of the omnipresent Amun-Ra.

To follow "nature" in this context means to restore one's primordial "golden" nature which is spiritual and sun-like. While observing that the number 36 (i.e., the number of the Egyptian decans, divine beings with serpent's bodies and lion's heads, sometimes depicted as 36 stars which appear along with Osiris, Horus, Thoth, Isis, and Nephthys) has been given the name *kosmos* by the Pythagoreans, since 36 is made up of the first four even numbers and the first four odd numbers added together, Plutarch says:

"If, then, the most noted of the philosophers, observing the riddle of the Divine in inanimate and incorporeal objects, have not thought it proper to treat anything with carelessness or disrespect, even more do I think that, in all likelihood, we should welcome those peculiar properties existent in natures which possess the power of perception and have a soul and feeling and character. It is not that we should honour these, but that through these we should honour the Divine, since they are the clearer mirrors of the Divine by their nature also, so that we should regard them as the instrument or device of the God who orders all things" (*De Iside* 76.382ab).

6. Hieratic Powers and Symbols of the Ineffable Father

For Egyptians of the Late period, governed by Assyrians and Persians, i.e., by the followers of Typhon in the traditional scheme of things, represented by the confusing and destructive power of Apep (Apophis), the archetypal enemy of Ra, the king cannot be viewed as a living embodiment of demiurgic power, a living *tut* of Ra or a token of Horus. Therefore the function of embodying the divine had been assumed by sacred animals and animal-like sages.

The god, or his spiritual power (*sekhem, ba*), embodied in a sacred animal is recognizable by its form and colouring, its *eidos*. However, the god incarnated (as the ram-like Christ in the Christian tradition) is exposed to the hazards and terrors of this world, from which he (in his immanent form, not in his powerful transcendent aspect which remains intact, like the undescended and hegemonic part of the soul in Plotinus) had to be protected by the performance of complicated and extremely precise sacred rites. He is equivalent to the king (protected by the same rites) and, by extension, to the whole mythologized country and its symbolic landscape.

Since pharaohs were regarded as living incarnations of the solar deity, they belonged to the same theological category as sacred animals.[10] The philosopher-priest occupies the same position, being a representative and organon of the Horus-king, and (due to the royal appointment, initiation, or illumination) a receptacle or container of the divine presence. The same divine power animates statues, images, temples, and inhabits sacred animals, though this "incarnation" is aimed at sustaining the world, not redeeming it in a Christian sense. Through sacred rites and images (including servants of God likened to the holy statues) the cosmic order is kept and both the demiurgic and theurgic work of unending descents and ascents goes on.

According to J. Assmann, though animal cults were already an integral feature in New Kingdom Egypt, until the Ptolemaic period they had been secondary phenomena. Only the Ptolemies, the Macedonian rulers, placed the animal cult at the centre of Egyptian religion, giving it a triangular metaphysical base. The complex of a "sacred animal", as a manifestation of the divine, occupies three different ontological levels: 1) solar manifestation or particular form of Ra (e.g., Apis-Osiris), 2) living incarnation in animal form (e.g., Apis bull), 3) transfigured immortalization, represented by the mummified Osiris figure (e.g., Osiris-Apis).[11]This triangular scheme may be regarded as a model of the soul's (*ba*) wandering, that is, its procession along the theophanic rays, *proodos*, and subsequent *epistrophe* through the rite of embalming which restores the integrity of its Osirian *eidos*. Thus in the Ptolemaic period, "the cult of the sacred animal, the political rule of the king, and the cosmic energy of the sun's circuit are harnessed into a triangle of salvational power".[12]

This salvational power is inseparable from the Egyptian temples, the places of philosophizing, according to Chaeremon, which guaranteed the connection between One and Many, between the divine *bau* and the multitude of things. The holy writings themselves are called "*bau* of Ra", thus being regarded as solar (noetic) manifestations and revelations which codify the universe-sustaining power of Ra. The temple's structure, decoration and ritual practice exactly corresponded to those holy writings, "*bau* of Ra", translating them into earthly practice. Therefore the transforming and elevating power of relational, connective theurgy was wrought through all symbolic forms and their cultic materializations, including architectural forms, words, images, smells and odours. The Byzantine writer Michael Psellus stands on firm ground, not relying on spurious hearsay, when he argues:

"The point of view of the Egyptians… is not wholly clear, but everything is symbolic (*alla panta sumbolika*). For they have sphinxes, and ibises, and some special forms stored away in treasures, and some other things of which the outward appearance does not transcend sense-perception, but they claim that by means of these things they are copying the intelligible world" (fr.15D, Paris Gr.1182, fol.277v).

Contrary to the pantheistic (and materialistic) fantasies of the moderns, the Egyptians thought the gods to be hidden and transcendent. Their remoteness (since not everybody is spiritually reborn in order to contemplate the visible world as a set of theophanies) can be overcome either 1) through the pharaoh who is regarded as the last link in the divine chain, representing or embodying Horus, or 2) through divine images, since the *ba* of one or another god descends and enters his cult-likeness in the temple.

Regarding the pharaoh, in some cases he is considered as a divine character only when he is performing sacred rites or when he is in the special state provided by the institution of kingship, i.e., deified with the horn, the sun disk, and the crescent during his coronation. However, in the New Kingdom, he is often viewed as an earthly manifestation of Amun-Ra and portrayed sitting in the boat of the sun god – the desired goal of all initiates and sages. The Egyptians used certain animals, namely, the bull, lion, dog, and falcon to express the divinity of the pharaoh. Several kings of the New Kingdom are iconographically transformed into sacred animals: they are depicted with a falcon's head and incorporate signs of a sacred bird or are represented as a sphinx, the god Harakhte, i.e. Horus of the horizon (*akhet*).

Since the king is suckled by the goddess Hathor and through her milk, meaning the divine spirit and knowledge, "becomes a god" within the articulated archetypal constellation, he functions as a visible icon and model for all spiritual aspirations, being an interpreter (*hermeneus*) between the noetic and sensible realms. The unification of *ba* and image in the temple is carried out according to the same metaphysical paradigm, though on a different level. The temple cult followed daily rhythms of the sacred calendar, thus every morning repeating the primeval cosmogony, acting along with the cosmic and transcendent forces, active through the entire hierarchy of being. Though the temple is never bereft of the divine presence, liturgically every morning the god comes down and unities with his images, the cultic receptacles, and the entire temple regarded as a single entity.

"Your *ba* in heaven unites with his image so that the one unites with its counterpart", runs an inscription in the Horus' temple, making clear the relationship between an archetype and its image. The *neter* as a transcendent entity remains intact: only his invisible *ba* (depicted as a visible falcon, ibis, *bennu*-bird or sun-ray) descends by the train of the permanent demiurgy, or procession, in order to show the theurgic way of integrating an image back to its archetype.

The divine *ba* represents the invisible part of *sumbolon*, initially understood as a *tessera hospitalis* broken into two separate parts, while an image represents the visible side at the level of sensibles. Their union is performed in the temple as a complicated sacred drama repeated again and again. Every "day" the One becomes many and restores its initial unity, just as the dismembered divine Eye is restored through the wisdom of Thoth, i.e., through hieroglyphs, rites, and sacrifices.

None of these images shows the true form of a god, since the true form of every god is hidden. This means that though a god can inhabit his cult images, hieroglyphs, sacred animals and priests (who assume the role of the gods outwardly by wearing animal masks and bearing divine signs or inwardly – making their heart-intellects perfect mirrors), none of these images, animals, ritual objects, minerals, plants, words of power, or numbers reveal the true nature of God who transcends both the noetic archetypes and their reflections.

However, images and symbols, functioning in exactly the same manner as the Neoplatonic *sunthemata*, the mysterious and ineffable tokens, serve as tools for the preservation of order, elevation, and divinization. Being visible representations of the noetic archetypes, of the eternal demiurgic Forms, the Egyptian hieroglyphs themselves are frequently called "gods", different signs of the script standing for different gods, lsimilar to Pythagorean numbers and geometric figures playing the same role.

Moving through the set of cosmic hieroglyphs (since all shapes of the sacred art – from giant statues to small amulets and household utensils – are extensions and prolongations of this holy script) to the realm of their noetic paradigms constitutes the path towards the true Forms of the gods. However, this path is the path of death and rebirth on different ontological levels. Only the blessed "deceased", the initiates who have become *akhu*, can contemplate the Forms and Ideas in the realm of Ra. This way demands an *askesis:* purification from any pollution, purity of the heart and inner alchemical transformation. Like the Pythagorean spiritual ideal "to follow god", it also included the contemplation of the cosmic order and understanding of the rhythmical relations, expressed both in mythical motifs and mathematical proportions, in music, song, and dance which belong to the realm of Hathor. This goddess is identified with *maat*, the chief principle of cosmic harmony and order, with the primordial vibration which emits a creative sound, as well as with an equilibrium of scales and joyful "drunkenness". The first heartbeat, the first breath, the first dance mark the beginning of ritual which is life itself in all its polarizations, oscillations, and ecstasies.

The Pythagoreans regarded medicine as the right means to purify the body; music, to purify the soul. In the broader sense (having in mind the Egyptian temples), "music" means all the complexity of hymns, dances, and ritual dramas along with their symbolic gestures, perfumes, illuminations, and visions (both sensible and supra-sensible). But the true divine essence transcends all figures. Therefore "the true hymn to the Father is not made up of a combination of words or a ritual of actions", according to Proclus (*Chald. Phil.* II). It shows the theurgic power of faith, and this faith results in the "musical life" (*mousikos bios*), or the life full of the unitary divine intuition (*noesis*, which transcends human reasoning) and bliss. However, this "musical life" is based on an integral theurgic attitude which uses symbols as a means of support and leads the soul towards its own unity, thus revealing the magnificent unity of all creation. Proclus says:

"For each thing when it enters into the unspeakable depths of its own nature will find there the Symbol of the Universal Father (*to sumbolon tou panton patros*). Everything honours Him by its very nature and is unified by means of this its own mystic Sign (*mustikou sunthematos*), so that it abandons its own nature and seeks only to become one with its Sign (*sunthema*) and in this way to possess only Him, out of its yearning for the Unknowable and the Source of all good".[13]

"For this reason, those who are skilled in the sacred art (*tes hieratikes hegemones*) have found a means of reaching the higher powers from those things which are within our sight, by mixing some of them together and by effacing others properly. The mixture is accomplished by means of looking, one after another, at each of the unmixed things that has a divine characteristic (*idioteta tou theou*), so that by mixing several things in this way these aforementioned images are unified, and the unity that results from all of them is made similar to the Whole Unity that exists prior to all things (*to pro ton panton holon*). On the other hand, they frequently make figurines (*agalmata*) which are compounded (from several things) and then burned, by which means their divided divine Signs (*sunthemata*) are mingled together and create artificially that which the Divine includes within itself naturally (*kat' ousian*) by its unification (*kath' henosin*) of all these powers; for the division of these powers weakened each one of them, but their mixture is able to lead us back to the Idea of their Model" (*tou paradeigmatos idean: Hier. Art.*150).[14]

7. Philosophical Life of the Egyptian Priests

The Egyptian priests were official substitutes for the king who had a very precise role to play in maintaining the actualized divine presence in the sanctuary and the rhythms of the cosmos itself, regarded as a semiotic system of heliophanies. By making the offerings, *hetepu* (the *hetep* hieroglyph shows a loaf of bread placed as an offering on a mat and means offering, altar, plenty, Nile, rest, peace, satisfaction of the heart-intellect) they keep the articulated breath of life flowing, sustain *kau* of the ancestors, preserve the Union of the Two Lands (*sema tawy*), of Horus and Seth, of *Peras* and *Apeiron.*

To maintain the universe in the form in which the gods created and ordered it also means to maintain the purity and integrity of man as an *imago dei,* constantly restoring his spiritual equilibrium and peace through special rites and knowledge, i.e., constantly "philosophizing". If the temple priest is a substitute for the Son of Ra, he himself must become Ra-like as far as possible, that is, to be likened to a pure "mirror" (*ankh*), polished by contemplation, devotion and proper ceremonial conduct. The inscription from the Horus temple in Edfu gives the following admonition:

"You who are men of importance, never let a long time pass without an invocation to Him, when you are away from Him present offerings to Him and praise Him in His temple" (Edfu III.361).

Priests had to prepare themselves for sacred duties by strict purity, avoidance of any misdeeds, and, keeping the hieratic rites and esoteric knowledge from the uninitiated, by serving the gods and the supreme God with a pure heart. The benefits of the spiritual life acquired by these "great and pure priests, guardians of the secrets, pure in the Lord" are described as follows:

"How happy is he who celebrates Thy Majesty, oh great God, and who never ceases to serve Thy temple. He who extols Thy power, who exalts Thy grandeur, who fills his heart with Thee... He who follows Thy path, comes to Thy watering-place, he who is concerned for Thy Majesty's design. He who worships Thy spirit with the reverence due the gods, and who says Thy office... He who conducts the service regularly and the service of the holy days without error... You who tread the path of Ra in His temple; who watch over his dwelling place [occupied] to conduct His holy days, to present His offerings, without cease: enter in peace, leave in peace, go in happiness. For life is in His hand, peace is His grasp, all good things are with Him: there is food for the one who remains at His table; there is nourishment for the one who eats of His offerings. There is no misfortune nor evil for the one who lives on His benefits; there is no damnation for the one who serves Him; for His care reaches to heaven and His security to the earth..." (Edfu V.343-344).[15]

The first permanent priestly dwellings inside the temple precincts appeared at the end of the New Kingdom. The strict and rigorous rules observed during the month of service (after which a "servant of God" returned for a while to his normal life) were extended. The priestly way of life, enclosed within temple walls, in certain cases becomes the pursuit of a whole life aimed at the inner Osirian transformation and union with the divine light. The instructions for ritual purity, and moral maxims, were frequently inscribed on the walls of the passageways through which the priests entered the temple, but the oral esoteric teachings were transmitted under strict secrecy. Even the ordinary servants of God were commanded to "reveal nothing that you see in any secret matter of the sanctuaries" (Edfu 361).

The House of Life (*per ankh*), which at the same time functioned as a school of the priests, scriptorium, library, and sanctuary, is sometimes depicted as an archetypal model of the cosmos, composed of four bodies, those of Isis, Nephtys, Horus, and Thoth at the corners with the Great Hidden (Osiris) resting in the interior. This theurgic cube-like mandala is revered as a place of esoteric training that provides knowledge of the invisible Osirian realm (Duat) and the noetic world of *akhu*. As an initiatory centre, *per ankh* is described in the following manner:

> "I shall be very, very well concealed.
> No one shall know it, no one see it,
> Except the disk of the sun, that looks into its secret.

> Those officiating… shall enter in silence, their bodies covered,
> So as to be protected against sudden death.
> The Asiatic must not enter, he must see nothing"
> (*Papyrus Salt* 825. VII.1;VII.5).

The scribe of the House of Life (*sesh per ankh*), usually equated to a "magician" in modern scholarship, is regarded as *hermeneus*, an interpreter of the hidden meaning in dreams, oracles, symbols, and sacred texts. Priests, as the keepers of *heka* powers, were able to function effectively in the intermediary psychic and higher noetic realms only because they (through initiations, visions, intellectual intuitions, and illuminations) actually "journeyed into Duat" and realized union with their supreme archetypes.

The power of Heka, as the creative power of Atum-Khepera (rendered incorrectly as "magic", but more resembling the "theurgy" of Hekate) is a mysterious divine force through which the universe becomes manifest and again returns to its source. This power of the creative *maya* serves as the theurgic *dunamis* by means of which the human being and all creation return to the realm of Amun-Ra and, finally, to the Waters of Nun. Therefore it is connected both with 1) *maat*, the right order (in political, social, philosophical, liturgical, and esoteric religious life conceived in unity), and 2) ineffable symbols of the unspeakable Father who contains all that becomes manifest, i.e., with Heka himself.

The rules of purification and moral conduct were only a part of the much more comprehensive body of knowledge guarded by the Egyptian priests. However, to live life according to virtue was of the first importance. Similarly, the later Neoplatonists regarded life according to virtue as a constant desire for, and doing what is, good. Since the good of the rational soul is no other than the return to its causes and the Good itself, in order to contemplate the Forms and be united with *Nous* and the One, the whole of our life is a struggle toward that vision and union. (Proclus *In Parm.* 1015.38-40).

Along with virtue, "love is the cause of the return of all things toward the divine Beauty" (*pasa taxis epistrophes estin aitia tois ousin hapasin pros to theion kallos:* Proclus *In Alcib.*325.10-12). The philosophical life (*philosophikos bios*) is guided by truth (*aletheia, maat*) and consists in theoretical and practical spirituality which may be described as an enthusiastic or inspired activity, subdivided into the aspects of goodness, beauty, and justice. *Philosophikos bios* of the Egyptian priests and pious people of civil groups who were making a kind of voluntary retreat also included contemplation of beauty (*nefer*), cultivation of knowledge and morality (since *gnosis* and *praxis* are interchangeable), and a certain divine possession (*mania* in the Platonic sense).

S. Sauneron describes the voluntary retreatants of the Late period as belonging to the category of "visionaries and fakirs", though the last term perhaps is used not in the initial Sufi sense (*faqr* meaning an ontological poverty in relation to the divine fullness), but in that invented by British Orientalists in the 19th century. S. Sauneron cites F. Cumont in this respect who does not specify the source of his rather extraordinary information about the visitors and "fakirs" of the Roman Egyptian temples:

"The abandonment of all bodily care seemed a testimony to their spiritual perfection, half-nude, clothed in rags, they let their hair grow like horses' tails, and sometimes, as a symbol of their voluntary imprisonment, they weighed down their emaciated bodies with chains. No doubt they also imposed rigorous abstinence on themselves, and discipline, and their asceticism made them appear worthy, in the eyes of the common people, to receive divine revelations".[16]

8. Proximity of the Gods and the *Bau* of Amun

Contrary to the earlier emphasis on transcendence, in Late period Egypt (starting at the end of the New Kingdom) a belief in the close proximity and immanence of the gods prevailed. In the wave of the defensive efforts raised by the threat of foreigners (equated to the followers of Seth – those who violate ancient traditions and sacred environments, profane sanctuaries and images, disclose and ridicule mysteries, causing global cosmic disaster), the role of Egypt as a dwelling of the gods is stressed.

Every temple is built according to archetypal divine patterns, representing the entire universe. Therefore Egypt is naturally regarded as the "temple of the gods", symbolically constructed from the dismembered parts of Osiris and animated by his *ba*, the sacred Memphite bull "Apis being the image (*eidolon*) of the soul of Osiris" (*De Iside* 20.359b). Hence, Egypt itself is an alchemical forge of transmutation, of turning the rotten corpse into the shining golden substance which appears when the *bau* of Osiris and Ra meet each other and become the united *ba* (*CT* IV.276-281). In addition, Egypt is the body of Isis, the dark womb of the goddess, the tomb which promises resurrection and spiritual rebirth. Plutarch says:

"Egypt, which is of a black soil in the highest degree as well as the black part of the eye, they call *chemia* and compare to a heart" (*De Iside* 33.364c).

The heart (*ab, ib*) is the seat of *gnosis, rekh*. The Memphite Demiurge Ptah conceived the universe in his Heart (Intellect) before bringing it forth by his Word. So, the heart-like black (kmt: *kemet*) land is a repository of the Osirian Black Art, ruled by Isis. In the Hermetic treatise *Kore Kosmou*, Kamemphis transmits the *gnosis* to Isis, gratifying her with the gift of the "Perfect Black", *Teleion Melas*.

However, kings, temples, statues, animals, and sages are only vessels of divine forces – they are not the gods themselves. The hymns addressed to Amun explicitly state that his *ba* is in the noetic realm of paradigms (the sky), his corpse or reconstructed *sah*-body in the intermediate realm of Duat, and his *khenty* (statue, image) in the sensible realm of images (on earth). In this sense, the temple is a sky on earth, the intelligible structure articulated in the sensible dimension. Therefore as the demiurgic Ideas inform matter, so *neteru* appear to human beings through the properly made corporeal receptacle (Platonic *hupodoche*): an animated image of the finest materials, including gold and lapis lazuli, marked with divine attributes and signs.

To certain extent, a human body (when purified and perfected) can function as a sacred receptacle. For theurgists, the so-called visionary matter may serve as a receptacle of the gods resulting in the experience of divine visions and theophanies (which make the material world transparent and holy), and, finally, in a corporeal unification with the gods[17] through the rites and *sunthemata*, that is, the ineffable divine names, hieratic images, incantations, melodies, rhythms, numbers and so on. According to Iamblichus:

"One must be convinced by secret teachings (*tois aporrhetois logois*) that a certain matter is given by the Gods by means of blessed visions (*dia ton makarion thematon hule tis ek theon paradidotai*), and this matter is somehow connatural with the gods who give it. Therefore, the sacrifice of this sort of matter stirs the gods up into manifestation, immediately invokes their appearance, receives them when they come forth, and reveals them perfectly" (*De myster.*234.7-14).

This theurgic perspective regards matter as divinely created, though the god who produced it is not the ineffable One but the Monad from the One, the first god and king (*protos theos kai basileus*), the principle of intelligibles (*ton noeton arche*).[18] Iamblichus, in his explanation of hieratic teachings of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, argues:

"The doctrine of the Egyptians concerning principles, proceeding from on high as far as to the last things, begins from one principle (*henos archetai*) and descends to a multitude which is governed by this one; and everywhere an indefinite nature is under the dominion of a certain definite measure and under the supreme uniform cause of all things" (De Myster.264.14-265 b).

The presence of the One and intelligible Monad, or Intellect, "father of essence" (*ousiopator*), is viewed as permeating all levels of manifestation – noetic, psychic, and sensible – this manifestation being based on an unbroken continuity between divine, imaginal, and sensible matter governed by numerical principles. Thus the theurgic efficiency of material symbols, talismans, and images (which constitute the visible body of Ptah or Geb) is established. Iamblichus says that certain "eternal measures" (*metra ton onton aidia: De myster.*65. b) are preserved in the theurgic symbols of the Egyptians.

In the Ramesside Amun-Ra theology, the world is regarded as a body of Amun, because he is the *ba* of the world, its spiritual-intelligible principle which gives life to the macrocosm and sustains it in the same way as the human *ba*, which also proceeds from the noetic realm and gives life to the human body. Accordingly, the solar Amun-Ra "gives his *bau* in millions of forms" (*Pap. Boulaq* 4.7.15). The light of the sun is called *ba* of Ra, and (as we have seen) the books of sacred wisdom and hieroglyphs themselves are the *bau* of Ra as well. The creative force of light is also the revelatory force, performing a life-and-knowledge-giving function in the world constituted by manifestations, or *bau* of God. The visible world may be called the *kheperu* of God, though the term *kheperu* (manifestation, coming forth) may be understood in many different senses.

The Ramesside theology distinguished the ten *bau* of Amun (like the proto-Pythagorean decad) which may be divided into two pentads. According to J. Assmann, this theology understands the *bau* of Amun "not as the visible world of itself, but as a decad of mediating powers that animate and sustain the world".[19]

The pharaoh, representing humankind in its entirety, is one of the ten *bau* and stands at the head of the second pentad which includes 1) human beings "in His name" of Royal-*ka*, 2) quadrupeds "in His name" of Falcon, 3) birds "in His name" of Harakhty, 4) aquatic creatures "in His name" of *Ba* of those in the water, 5) terrestrial creatures "in His name" of Neheb-kau.

The first pentad represents the life-giving elements, namely, time (twice), air, water, and light which are regarded as functions of 1) *Ba* in the right Eye, 2) *Ba* in the left Eye, 3) *Ba* of Shu, 4) *Ba* of Osiris, 5) *Ba* of Tefnut respectively.[20]

The pharaoh is one of ten *bau*, or manifestations of Amun, in the form of which the cosmos is animated, organized and sustained, meaning not an individual human being but the royal *ka* as such, the divine kingship (Horus) which is embodied in each pharaoh as the objective noetic power descending from Amun.

This Ramesside *ba* theology is translated into an esoteric cult-activity and initiations in the form of rituals, secretly performed in the hidden crypts of certain temples (e.g., Opet temple in Karnak). As J. Assmann pointed out, here we stand "on the threshold of Hermeticism and the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri, which to some extent develop a similar theo-cosmology".[21]

We should add that we now stand on the threshold of Neoplatonism which, in this respect, represents the culmination of the ancient metaphysical tradition. And this tradition, being multi-facetted (like Amun himself: "of many names, the number of which is not known") and having different mythical forms, levels, and historically determined shapes of manifestation, can in fact be traced back to the *Pyramid Texts* which already imply 1) the articulated hierarchy of being constituted by the divine archetypes and their images as well as 2) the royal ascent (*anagoge, epistrophe, mi'raj*) to the supreme Principle.

9. Perfumes, Images, and Contemplations

What can philosophical "contemplation" possibly mean in the context of Amun-Ra theology? It means contemplation of the Amunian *bau*, the immanent aspects of God, i.e., the combination of all different manifestations in which the cosmogonic energy of Amun-Ra is present and which operate in the created world. *Theoria* not only refers to looking with the sensible eyes but also means viewing with the intellect. This is contemplation as if one were a spectator at the games or the theatre. The intellectual kind of *theoria* (something inner, immediate, comprehensive) was not invented by Plato as certain scholars may argue, though Plato actually speaks of the philosophic nature as "a mind habituated to thoughts of grandeur and contemplation (*theoria*) of all time and all existence" (*Rep.*517d).

According to Diogenus Laertius, who is, in this respect, following Sosicrates, when asked who he was, Pythagoras replied, "A philosopher". As a contemplative philosopher, "Pythagoras used to compare life to the Great Games where some people come to contend for the prizes, and others for the purposes of traffic, but the best as spectators" (*Vitae* VIII.8).

Iamblichus explains that Pythagoras was the first to call himself a philosopher, a word which before this precedent had been a description, not an appellation. According to Iamblichus, "the purest and most genuine character is that of the man who devotes himself to the contemplation of the most beautiful things, and may be properly called a philosopher" (*Vita Pyth.*12).

For the New Kingdom Egyptians, this contemplation is a contemplation of the fascinating wonders and all-encompassing presence of God. Amun, as "*Ba*, shining with his two *uadjat* Eyes, *Ba*-like, who incarnates himself in incarnations", is both a principle which enables seeing and the object seen, as He reveals himself in the cosmic creation. However, this revealing or visualizing of the different forms in which the cosmogonic energy of the supreme God is present, is at the same time his concealing, since the Lord of all gods remains transcendent. The oracular decree of the XXI Dynasty pronounces:

> "Mysterious in incarnations, he whom one cannot know,
> Who has concealed himself from all gods.

> Who withdrew as the sun that cannot be recognized,
> Who hid himself from what he had created,
> Flaming torch with great light,
> One sees in the midst of his seeing.
> One spends the day contemplating him and is never sated with the sight of him,
> When day comes, all faces pray to him.
> Sparkling in manifestation in the midst of the Ennead,
> His form is the form of each god".[22]

The contemplation may culminate in visions (*epiphaneia*) coming in a waking state or dreams received by night. In both cases this experience is related as a "dream" (*rswt*). The mysterious and tremendous quality of the god's manifestations is described by listing his vehicles of power – both visible and invisible symbols.

Like the Holy Spirit in Christianity, Amun visited Hatshepsut (the queen of the XVIII Dynasty who ruled in 1478-1458 B.C.), taking on the form of her husband Tuthmosis I before revealing to her his true "form of a god" (*jrw n ntr*). The divine aroma wakes Hatshepsut indicating that Amun is present, because the scent of perfume, divine fragrance and radiance betray the approaching of deities. Since cosmetics and incense are life-giving substances related to the breath of Shu, or *pneuma*, the realm of *neteru* is depicted as drenched in perfumes called "the fragrance of the gods." Therefore the smell of incense accompanied the epiphany of a god and made his presence known.

The texts from the Old and Middle Kingdoms indicate that the bodies of the gods are of the most precious metals and gold. The solar barque of Ra is depicted as golden and radiant: the initiate and the blessed deceased turned into spirit (or intellect, *akh*) seek to partake of this radiant noetic substance and to become "one body" (this "body" being of the so-called intelligible matter, referred to by the Neoplatonists) with Amun-Ra, or Atum-Ra, Khnum-Ra, Sobek-Ra, and so on.

Just as every iconographically correct visible image enhances the reality of the ineffable God, so also does every name or combination of epithets which indicate different theological constellations and metaphysical structures symbolically expressed in myth and cult. It seems that Philo of Alexandria, who allegorically explains the account of *Exodus* XXX.34-35 as a "holy work" (*ergon hagion*) performed by the perfumer, bases his commentary on the ancient Egyptian tradition. The Egyptian name for incense is *seneter, seneteri* meaning "to make divine". The fragrance of burning seneter was thought to be both an indication of divine presence and the real *epiphaneia* of the god to whom the incense is offered and burnt. The Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandria was the great manufacturing centre for cosmetics and perfumes, including all kinds of incense which by the 1st century A.D. are partly replaced by resins from coniferous trees or terabinth. Philo of Alexandria relates perfumes to the creation of the cosmos, the real cosmogony:

"Now these four, of which the incense is composed, are, I hold, a symbol of the elements (*sumbola ton stoicheion*), out of which the whole world (*ho kosmos*) was brought to its completion. Moses is likening the oil drop to water, the cloves to earth, the galbanum to air, and the clear gum to fire" (*Quis rerum divinarum heres* 196-197).

"And this mixture thus harmoniously compounded proves to be that most venerable and perfect work, a work in very truth holy (*to presbutaton kai teleiotaton ergon hagion hos alethos einai*), even the world which he holds should, under the symbol of incense offering, give thanks to its Maker (*dia sumbolon tou thumiamatos oeitai dein eucharistein to pepoiekoti*), so that while in outward speech it is the compound formed by the perfumer's art (*he murepsike techne*) which is burnt as incense, in real fact it is the whole world, wrought by divine wisdom (*ergo de ho theia sophia demiourgetheis kosmos*), which is offered and consumed… in the sacrificial fire" (ibid.199).

The perfume-like cosmos is clearly the manifestation of Heka and Shu whose life-giving and miraculous *pneuma* constitutes the earth of theophanies, the body of otherwise immaterial Geb. Arguing that Egyptian theology is to a large extent the product of certain higher type of perception (or *noesis*, we would say) J. Naydler discusses imaginative insights into the invisible realm provided by symbols and images. This insight into the "inner space" of *neteru* is not a mental construct or psychological projection, because the cosmological domains, manifested and sustained by the divine powers (*sekhemu, bau*), "are only marginally physical, and insofar as they are physical they are also symbolic". He says:

"The image of the earth god is clearly not based simply on sense perception, nor is it based on logical reasoning. It is an imaginative vision that sees through the physical landscape into its interiority".[23]

This *theoria* is a vision rather than a doctrine of what knowledge is, and this vision has to do with both physical and noetic seeing. To a certain degree, not only seeing, but also other senses have their noetic counterparts, i.e., *sensibilia, quae sunt incorporea et intellectualia* in Origen's sense. According to Origen:

"Anyone who looks into the matter more deeply will say that there is, as the Scripture calls it, a certain generic divine sense (*theia tis genike aisthesis*), which only the man who is blessed finds on this earth" (*Contra Celsum* I.48).

It means that the five senses have their noetic analogues and inspired and alchemically transformed souls can perceive through the spiritual senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch which transcend normal senses. Plotinus asserts the same when he says that "perceptions (*aistheseis*) here are dim intellections (*noeseis*), and intellections there (i.e., in the noetic realm) are vivid perceptions" (*Enn.* VI.7.7.30-32). In the earthly domain *sensibilia* are simply dim versions of higher, noetic *sensibilia.* J. Dillon maintains that this is "more revolutionary and peculiar… than simply talking of forms or paradigms of *sensibilia.* He seems to mean, rather, noetic correlates of *sensibilia*".[24]

However, this "revolutionary" attitude is the normal attitude of the ancients, to whom the physical universe still was (to a certain extent) transparent to the noetic realm of archetypes. While "mythologizing" and "philosophizing" they did not interpret the physical world or "nature" in some "fantastic" fashion, but rather contemplated the noetic order dimly seen through physical veils. This contemplation is conducted through the power of *sumbolike theoria* and certain spiritual or imaginative perception. The sensible realm is thought of as an image of the ideal, carefully ordered and articulated by Maat, the goddess who symbolizes the primordial pristine state of the world, mathematical harmony, proportion, right measure and truth. Therefore we should agree with R. Lawlor when he remarks:

"In ancient Egypt the audial sense – that is the direct response to the proportional laws of sound and form – was considered as the epistemological basis for philosophy and science. This is evoked by the blind harpist, whose proverbial wisdom comes not from the visual world of appearance but from an inner vision of metaphysical law".[25]

As has been mentioned already, the true form of a god, his noetic *eidos*, is revealed to human beings here below only in the most exceptional cases, i.e., to the chosen ones and initiates of the highest rank. Therefore images function as intermediaries for the Egyptian who lives in a state of unsatisfied longing for the contemplation of the beauty, goodness, and perfection (all of them are called *neferu*) of one or another divine face (*hra*) which both conceals and reveals the hidden God, "rich in manifestations". He cannot be comprehended in the totality of his attributes, except through Atum, or noetic *pleroma* itself.

Since all sacred animals are the *bau* of a deity, being a visible manifestation of an invisible power, "as the wind is the *ba* of the air god Shu and the visible sun is the *ba* of the sun god", they may play the role of speakers and heralds of the gods, i.e., function as angels. Arguing that individual animals and sacred images are not the gods themselves but their bodies and vessels, E. Hornung says:

"For simple worshippers image and deity may merge, and they may encounter the god Thoth personally in every Ibis, but the theology of the priests always distinguishes carefully in formulations that vary from period to period, between animal and deity. For the priests, the animal remains a symbol in the foreground, an intermediary between man and god".[26]

In this respect, the ruling pharaoh differs from the sacred animal or hieratic statue, being an image (*tut*) of Ra, but not his direct manifestation (*kheperu*) in a strict sense, though boundaries between these terms are frequently blurred and a manifestation "like Ra", or "likeness of Ra, illuminating this world like the sun disk," becomes imperceptibly a manifestation "as Ra", "of the person of Ra".[27]

Though almost all Egyptian references to the human being as an *imago dei* are related to the pharaoh, the prime son of Ra (thus being regarded as the Perfect Man in a Sufi sense of *al-insan al-kamil*), by extension such designations are applied to all men who are "likenesses" (*snn*) of God, "who came from His flesh" and may prove by their actions and intellect that they are images of God. This doctrine is explicitly stated circa 2060 B.C. in the wisdom literature texts which emphasize *gnosis*, saying that the man of knowledge is a "likeness" (*mjtj*) of god", meaning "a fundamental kinship of action, nature, and rank".[28]

10. Divine Knowledge and Paradigms for Philosophical Mysteries

For Egyptian priests, from the highest ranks of hierarchy to the ordinary "servants of God" (*hemu neter, hemet neter*), theoretical and practical life were inseparable. Many of them led strictly cloistered and regimented lives – which may be called "ascetic" in the Orphic and Pythagorean sense – thus devoting all their time to purification, worship, contemplation of divine beauties, and meditation. Their activities were centred on the cultivation of hieroglyphic script (*medu neter*), as a form of sacred art, and of various sciences, including geometry and scriptural exegesis. However, they were not a "sect" (*hairesis*), like Orphics, Pythagoreans and Platonists (who in one way or another represented an "esoteric" or "scientific" opposition to the prevailing customs and strategies of thought) in Greece, but belonged to the mainstream of culture.

The Late Egyptian priesthood represented both the core of official religion and its kernel, its very heart, without any tension between them. The priests were not adherents of some other-worldly opposition against a this-worldly state, because in ancient Egypt the distinction between "this" sensible realm and "that" intelligible world never took the form of reaction against this world: "here" and "there" remained completely integrated into a single sphere of belonging.[29] In addition, the educated spiritual elite and the powerholding elite were one and the same,[30] so that spiritual masters and sages were at the same time royal state officials, administrators, and scribes.

In accord with his rank in the cosmic hierarchy, the king, as the royal *ka*, was the chief Mystagogue and Philosopher of the temple-like state. The *kau* of ordinary men belonged to the king who, in a sense, was everybody's *ka*, or double, which was pictured as bearing in its hands the *ankh* hieroglyph of life and the feather of *maat* and which formed an exact replica of the king's physical body. According to J. Naydler, the pharaoh had authority over *ka* forces, being able to "unite the hearts" of all the people:

"The king therefore lived on earth in a state of consciousness that was attainable for most people only after death; that is, in a state of consciousness infused with *ka* energy, but with the important difference that this state of consciousness was maintained by him as an individual, whereas for most people at death their individual self-consciousness became absorbed into that of the ancestral group. And to the extent that they experienced their *ka* during life, they located it outside themselves either in the ancestor or… in the king or some other powerful figure".[31]

The priests, as the chief representatives of the king (or his ideal image), were the real spiritual masters and followers of Thoth, the divine Scribe. However, their most important function consisted not in composing and interpreting of sacred texts, elaborating of theological doctrines or cultivating arts (including calligraphy, "the handwork of Thoth"), but in the correct performance of hieratic rites. Similarly, in later Hellenic philosophy the main task of philosophers is not cultivation of written traditions for their own sake, but putting them into *praxis*. Just as the Egyptian sacred texts, hymns, and ritual instructions are indispensable sources for the correct performance of hieratic rites and liturgies, for the construction and decoration of temples, and for proper living according to the heart-intellect, so too the Hellenic philosophical texts, first of all, are instructions for truly living and seeking only the good for the soul, both moral and intellectual.

Egyptian temples of the Late period housed the "philosophizing" communities whose members, apart from the daily cult service, promoted a way of life characterized by asceticism, contemplation, and "Kabbalistic" manipulation with hieroglyphs, i.e., the constant practice of cryptography and metaphysical hermeneutics, understood as a theurgic imitation of demiurgy. They lived in the grammatically and semiotically articulated meta-structure of symbols. The writing system (along with its pursuit of the etymography and hidden connections based on the strictly "geometric" and at the same time mysterious coherence of the *Logos*-made world) constituted only a part of the larger "grammar of the temple" and "grammar of the noetic realm".

The sacred rites translated the divine knowledge into action, be it 1) a cosmic-order-keeping liturgy, 2) the soul transforming initiations and mysteries (*shetau*, *sesheta*) or 3) ritualized daily conduct.

The whole fabric of the Egyptian state was seen as depending on the constant theurgic dynamics of sacred forces. The life-and-order-supporting chant articulated an archetypal structure of ontology, thus following the light-like patterns of the creative Word (Hu) and Wisdom-Perception (Sia), directed by the miraculous power of Heka. Arguing that sacred hymns and offerings are adorned with music (since the object of music is the love of the beautiful) Aristides Quintilianus says:

"There is also in the body of the universe a palpable paradigm of music. The fourth, again, reveals the material tetractys, the fifth connotes the ethereal body, and the octave the musical motion of the planets" (*De musica* III.20). Therefore "dialectic and its converse (i.e., rhetoric) profited the soul with judgement (*phronesis*) if they employed the soul purified by music, but without this, they not only did not profit, but sometimes even led the soul astray" (ibid., I.1).

Only music is extended through all matter, composing the body with proper rhythm, and "it explains both the nature of numbers and the variety of proportions; it gradually reveals the *harmoniai* that are, through these, in all bodies; and most important and most perfect and concerning a thing difficult for all men to comprehend, it is able to supply the ratios of the soul – the soul of each person separately and, as well, even the soul of the universe" (ibid. I.1).

Ritual efficacy also depends on tuning, sensitive to the exact proper sound (which reflects and prolongs the creative Sound of cosmogony) for the exact nuance of the spiritual and bodily state, seasons, and any event. Since "by different tunings the idea is changed",[32] the sounds, carried by *heka* power and guided by Hathor, can harmonize and elevate the soul, as well as to put into the proper "attuned" order the entire state, its institutions and its sacred environment.

To render *heka* as "magic", as this Egyptian term is usually understood, is a rather incorrect hermeneutical projection distorted by Christian and modern Western consciousness. Heka is the creative power of Atum-Khepera, his Maya-Shakti beyond which there is no stronger ontological force, because through Heka the entire noetic, psychic, and physical universe is irradiated, established, and arranged according to the laws of *maat*. And by means of Heka all creatures and all divine images return to their archetypes, even to the unmanifest and ineffable Principle itself. Heka, in fact, is the main agent of demiurgy and theurgy, of descent and ascent, of living according to truth (*maat*). As the all-sustaining "Magic" it underlies every construction and deconstruction.

The term *askesis* in Graeco-Roman antiquity is understood as the practice of spiritual exercises. The excerpts from Homer and Hesiod were sung for cathartic purposes by the Pythagoreans who by such ritualistic use of the "sacred books" tried to tranquillize (*kathemeroun*) the soul (Porphyry *Vita Pyth.*32). Since philosophy, like sacred chants, has a therapeutic function, it aims at the profound transformation of human seeing, understanding, and being, thus, in this respect, resembling the methods of Egyptian priests. Philosophical contemplation (*theoria*), according to Porphyry, does not consist in discursive reasoning and accumulation of abstract teachings, even if their subjects are intelligible realities and true Being. For him the whole Platonic philosophy consists in two fundamental exercises (*meletai*): 1) turning away from all that is mortal and material, 2) coming back to the noetic realm and participating in the activity of Intellect (*De abst.* I.30) which is represented by Amun-Ra for the Egyptian priests.

If the goal of philosophical separation from the body means to liberate the soul, thereby "calming the sea of passions", or to contemplate and draw nourishment "from the true, the divine" (Plat. *Phaed.*84a), this procedure is the same as separation of the immortal *ba* from the mortal shell, *khat*, in order to attain the realm of light-like Intellect, of the Creator Ra himself. This transformative process may be rendered into the terms of rational philosophical discourse and interpreted as liberation from a partial, passionate point of view, "so as to rise to the universal, normative perspective, to submitting the soul to the demands of the *logos* and the norm of the Good".[33]

According to P. Hadot, who explains the spiritual exercises enumerated by Philo of Alexandria, philosophical therapeutics consist in research (*zetesis*), thorough investigation (*skepsis*), listening (*akroasis*), attention (*prosoche*), reading (*anagnosis*), meditations (*meletai*), therapies of passions (the word *therapeia* may also mean acts of worship), remembrance of good things (*ton kalon mnemai*), self-mastery (*enkrateia*), and the accomplishment of duties.[34]

Attention (*prosoche*), or continuous vigilance, also practised by the Egyptian priests, means pure intellective self-consciousness which never sleeps and constantly remembers God. For Egyptians, writing itself may be regarded as a "spiritual exercise" which surpasses anything that P. Hadot and Plato in his Theuth story about *pharmakon* for the memory (*Phaedr.*274-275) could allow a sober rationalist. Learning to write means learning a particular way of life under the patronage of Sesheta, or Seshat, a lady of books who dwells by the Tree of Heaven and is depicted in the form of a woman wearing a leopard skin and holding a writing-reed and a scribe's pallete in her hands.

Sesheta, sheta, shetau also stand for mysteries, secrets, hidden things. The word *sesh* (a scribe) and *sesh* (to write) are pronounced in the same way, though depicted in a slightly different manner. Knowledge of how to behave, to administer the city (*niut*) of deity and the divine household (*per neter*), to perform the sacred rites, to interpret "divine words" (*medu neter*) and oracles, and how to transform the soul, is the prerogative of the followers of Thoth and Sesheta. Those who still being alive are able to see the *akh* of Thoth (from which all knowledge is derived) become "gnostics" (*rekhu*), like those called *shemsu Heru* – the ancestral spirits who belong to the train of Horus.

In the Egyptian priestly tradition emphasis is laid on knowledge (*rekh*) and wisdom (*saret*) through which alone 1) the pious and happy life here below is possible and 2) transformation, unification, rebirth, and realization of one's true identity in Duat is achieved. Therefore the divine names, epithets, spells, and all that are called *hekau* (theurgic or magic words of power) have crucial roles to play.

However, the ancient Egyptian *gnosis* stands at variance with Graeco-Roman gnosticism which borrowed much from the Egyptian theologies, but neglected their essential message and arrogantly debased the beautifully arranged cosmos, governed by *maat*. The Hermetic circles, which were probably special groups of initiates in the Late Egyptian (Ptolemaic) temples – those who followed the way of Thoth (Hermes) and Imhotep (Asclepius) – maintained that the gods endowed the priests of Egypt with three arts: philosophy, magic, and medicine. These arts, assigned both for the soul and the body, culminate in *gnosis* which leads back to divine *Nous*. Like all knowledge worthy of its name, this elevating and unifying knowledge (inseparable from faith, pistis) is obtained through revelation, not discursive reasoning.

11. Priests and Spiritual Guides

The Egyptian priest (*uab*, "a pure one") is a guardian of the sacred (*uab*) in general and a keeper of all traditional sciences and methods imposed to acquire and preserve knowledge which is divine in its origin. The priesthood (unut) served in funerary cults, directed the embalming rituals, presided at festivals where they carried statues of the gods on portable shrines in procession, were employed in the royal service as architects, artists, ritual experts, magicians, and physicians, and sometimes even waged holy war on behalf of the gods.

The recording, interpretation and literary preservation of oracles is regarded as one of the major pursuits of the temple scriptorium in the Late pharaonic and Ptolemaic periods when the archaic priestly ritual for consulting the will of Amun and other deities (*peh neter*) was turned into mystical practice of private illumination and direct encounters with the divine through dreams (evoked by an incubation rite) and visions.

The Middle Kingdom (especially the XII Dynasty: c.1994-1781 B.C.) stands for a cultural "golden age", because the literature and art of this time were elevated to the rank of the "classical" paradigms and its language remained in use for sacred purposes until the Roman period. During this time the so-called wisdom-literature emerged as an integral part of the attempt to reorganize the state viewed as a representative theocracy based on justice, truth, and wisdom. Therefore the scholarly function of priests as literati and masters of a self-reflective way of life started to be emphasized. But those "philosophers", nonetheless, were loyal officials, bureaucrats and administrators of the pharaoh (chosen by the gods himself), thus establishing the close connection between literature, politics, and rhetoric.

The normative ideas of kingship (*ni sut*), vertical solidarity, religious merit and loyalism which constitute the path of salvation were set down in writing and widely disseminated. In the Middle Kingdom, the texts, in which the much older conception of *maat* was discursively developed, explicitly formulated and universalized, are both initiatory and testamentary in character. Thus a sort of *silsilah*, or train of transmission, is clearly implied. This transmission presupposes an initiation into right living and knowing. The oral tradition existed alongside, but the appearance of written "philosophical discourse" – which is self-reflective and consciously maintained – is symptomatic of the period of the XII Dynasty.

This initiatory philosophy mainly consisted in admonitions to be virtuous, i.e., in the ethic of self-effacement, integration, and spiritual perfection, based on the recognition of archetypal origins of order and implications provided by the doctrine of *imago dei*. According with the idea of "doing as you would be done by", *maat* is considered by God as "the reward of one who does something lying in something being done for him", i.e., in a kind of "karmic wage". The instructions are teachings carried from a father to his son. As the Father Atum embraces his intelligible children or the priest embraces a statue, thus transmitting the life-power of *ka*, so the spiritual father embraces his disciples.

This is the idea of the *diadoche*, or succession, familiar in the Hellenic philosophical schools. For example, the Neoplatonist Marinus (5th century A.D.) speaks about "the Golden Chain of philosophers that started with Solon" (*Vita Procli* XXVI). Solon himself supposedly studied with the Egyptian priests. The Hermetic *paideia* is also based on the established chain of *paradosis* (tradition) and proceeds by stages toward the final initiation. The inspired spiritual master, surrounded by a few disciples who sought a philosophical understanding, transformation of the soul and mystical vision, represents the divine Intellect itself, being its "incarnation" or rather a mirror (*ankh*) and an integral image (*tut, eikon*).

In early Hellenic antiquity, the spiritual guide, acting as legislator, statesman, philosopher, musician, and poet, reflects the ideal figure of the Centaur Cheiron, half-brother of Zeus (who is equated with Amun). Cheiron, the son of Kronos (the hypostasis *Nous* in the Neoplatonic hermeneutics), as an archetype of educator, unifies every form of wisdom and knowledge, thus introducing an integral *paideia*, such as the mythical king Osiris in the Egyptian accounts. Celebrated as a sage immersed in the depths of wisdom, Cheiron acts as Achilles' instructor in the art of healing and singing (since *therapeia* and music are inseparable) and as the teacher who taught the god Dionysus (the Egyptian Osiris) as a child the Bacchic rites and solemnities, according to Ptolemaios Chennos, the author of the 1st century A.D.

As Pindar, the famous Hellenic poet, attested, the Cheironian process of education consists in spending twenty years in a cave under the care of Cheiron's daughters (*Pythian* 4.103 ff). The cave in this context is analogous to the tomb (or coffin, *ankh*), regarded as a "school" and as a place of rebirth in Kemet, the "black land", i.e., Egypt.

The citharist and mystagogue Orpheus is another example of a mythical guide of souls, also regarded as an initiator of mysteries. The Orphic and Pythagorean doctrine of the moral and elevating effect of music – which includes word, rhythm, melody, mode, sound, and gesture, or canonised dance figure – can be fully understood only against the background of Egyptian musical *paideia*, supervised by the goddesses Hathor and Maat. The name "Orpheus" itself may be a translation of the Egyptian title for "hereditary prince"[35] given to Geb, the god of earth, who 1) functions as a harmonizer of "nature" (minerals, plants, animals) with the vital psychic principles of the Osirian Underworld and 2) partakes in the metaphysical process of creation, in his form of a Goose laying the cosmogonic Egg which is a prototype of the primeval Egg in the Orphic cosmogonies.

As I. Hadot pointed out, the "literary form of spiritual guidance, consisting of ethical and practical instructions presented in a succinct form and directed from a brother to his brother or from a father to his son, was already widespread in the Near East long before Hesiod."[36]

Though the models of this literary genre in the sphere of education were explicitly articulated in the Middle Kingdom Egypt, the same or similar instructions were imparted orally in the Old Kingdom – not only in the form of proverbs and sayings, but in the royal and priestly initiations that concerned metaphysical and theurgic matters usually kept in strict secrecy. The conspicuous absence in the XII Dynasty wisdom instructions of what J. Assmann calls "instruction of the heart", (i.e., "a theory of the inner man with a vocabulary of virtues, mentalities, and idealistic values, among which those pertaining to self-effacement were later to play the most important role",[37]) can only mean that the profound esoteric instructions are not revealed in written texts or that those texts themselves (which survived only in fragments) are not properly understood by modern scholars.

12. Egyptian Scribes and the Way of Imhotep

The Egyptian scribe (*sesh*) is usually depicted as seated at the feet of Thoth, the all knowing Lord of wisdom, rituals, and offerings, shown in the form of a baboon (*ian*), writing down what this deputy of Ra reveals to him. Typologically, this hieratic figure is equivalent to the angel (*malak*) Gabriel, who speaks from the world of the unseen (*'alam al-ghayb*) in the Quranic tradition.

As early as the XI Dynasty (c.2040-1994 B.C.) we encounter the claim that certain sages are instructed by Thoth, the guardian of the Eye of Horus, who unites in himself and transcends all oppositions or contradictory essences. The wings of Thoth assist the initiate or the *ba* of the deceased to accomplish the theurgic ascent to the realm of intelligibles. As E. Hornung pointed out, a unique figure of a winged "angel" of uncertain identity is depicted in a scene of judgement after death in a Ramesside tomb: the flickering lines that surround this figure indicate the radiance of divine presence.[38]

The deceased, due to his metaphysical *paideia* and already acquired *gnosis*, identifies himself with Thoth and then turns to Osiris so as to legitimise himself through his knowledge of hidden things and true identities. Similarly, Hermes of the Graeco-Egyptian magical papyri is not only *pantokrator*, the world-ruler, presiding over fate, justice, and wisdom, but may also dwell within the heart of man (*enkardios*), thus representing his higher noetic Self. The pharaoh (*per aa*) is regarded as Thoth in every respect, because he, as a perfect *tut* (*eikon*) of God, or the Perfect Man, unites in himself all names and qualities of Thoth, i.e., all noetic archetypes of Atum-Ra, reflected in the living mirror of Horus.

Sacred writings, ascribed to Thoth, are said to be found inside or at the feet of his statues. In the Middle Kingdom texts we already hear about a "divine Book of Thoth" which may be understood as existing on different ontological levels, from the noetic plenitude and unity of archetypes to the "scattered limbs" of sensible books. According to Plotinus the Egyptian:

"For as the language (*logos*) spoken by voice is an imitation (*mimema*) of that in the soul, in the same way that one in the soul is an imitation of the one in the other [hypostasis, *Nous*]" (*Enn.* I.2.3.27f).

For Neoplatonists, there are different levels of language that correspond to different modes of perception and being, extending from the creative divine Language (Hu, the noetic abundance, plenitude, creative will of God that expressed itself in "words", the demiurgic *logoi*) down to the language fragmented and scattered on the level of senses, like the dismembered Osiris. On the statue of the sage Amenhotep son of Hapu, made circa 1360 B.C., it is written:

"I am introduced to the book of the god, I saw the transfigurations of Thoth and was equipped with their mysteries".[39]

In the demotic *Book of Thoth*, composed probably in the first century B.C., dialogue takes place between Thoth and his disciple, the Lover of Knowledge (*Mer-rekh*), regarding knowledge (*rekh*) which leads to immortality, about the sacred topography of Egypt and the Osirian Netherworld, as well as secret languages and mysteries. Such philosophical conversations, also involving Osiris and probably based on earlier examples, sometimes allude to Imhotep (Imouthes), one of the central Egyptian sages of the Old Kingdom, who under the name of Asclepius entered the Hermetic literature. Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu are two paradigmatic Egyptian saints, elevated to the rank of gods and patrons of the entire society.

A statue base of the III Dynasty pharaoh Djoser (c.2650 B.C.) is inscribed with the names and titles of Imhotep, maintained by the Egyptian tradition to be the prototype of all sages and philosophers. Belonging to the "priesthood of the Ibis", he is regarded as the author of the earliest examples of stone architecture and of wisdom literature. Imhotep, the high priest of Heliopolis, "the chief of the sculptors, of the masons and of the producers of stone vessels",[40] performed the highest functions in the cult of Atum-Ra. Perhaps he had already served as an architect during the reign of Hor-Seth Khasekhem when stone was first used as a building material on a considerable scale, and then during the reign of Sanakht-Nebka, the founder of the III Dynasty at about 2670 B.C. Imhotep continued his work for the pharaoh Netjerkhet Djoser planning and building the Step Pyramid complex in Saqqara.

Being the chief lector-priest, Imhotep, son of Ptah, was the chief expert in all theurgic and protective rituals. The lector-priest (*heri heb*) is a master of *heka* forces and sacred books of the temple. He knows all sacramental and divine attributes immanent in the created world, all traditional symbols and their hidden theurgic powers, all healing-spells, safety-spells, curse-spells, and amulets. He may be regarded as a "magician" (although this term is distorted and demonized by subsequent spiritual traditions, especially Christianity) - not as a freelance wizard, of course, but as an orthodox gnostic of the state who deals with divine manifestations (*bau*) and their hidden essences. In contrast to the intellectual practices of a lector-priest – who was a guardian of traditional lore, transmitted both orally and in sacred letters within the temple institutions – the charisma and ritual performance of ta *rekhit,* wise woman, remained oral and restricted to the sacred environment of the local community.

After his death Imhotep gradually became the patron of scribes and lovers of knowledge (*rekh*) – those who in principle were "philosophers", leading their special ritualized way of life, ultimately aimed at noetic immortalization through an imitation of Imhotep, son of Ptah, "successful in his action, great in miracles" (*Brit. Mus.*1027/147). The literary works and wisdom teachings of Imhotep were well known to the Egyptian scribes. They depicted Imhotep in a sitting posture, dressed in the long apron, the tight blue cap of Ptah, with the papyrus unrolled on his lap, bearing the written votive offering:

"Water from the water-pot of every scribe to your *ka,* O Imhotep".

The image of a sitting scribe Imhotep, who is sometimes shown with 1) the *uas* sceptre, as a sign of power and dominion, and 2) the hieroglyph *ankh*, as a symbol of the divine breath of life, was itself regarded as a vessel of divine inspiration and wisdom. Under the New Kingdom, Imhotep replaced Nefertum (who rises from the primordial lotus at the nostrils of Ra) in the Memphite triad of Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertum. As the great *Heri heb*, Imhotep is the image and likeness of Thoth.

By the time of the XXX Dynasty the divinized Imhotep not only served as a mediator between the community of *neteru* and the human world, acting as a healer and messenger, but was also included in the triad of Ptah, Apis-Osiris, Imhotep. In the Ptolemaic period, Teos, the high priest of Memphis, in his prayer to Imhotep, described him as he "who calculates everything for the library; who restores what is found demolished in the holy books; who knows the secrets of the house of gold" (*Vienna* 154: PM III.214).

The house of gold was the name given both to the workshop where statues of the gods were "given birth" and to the burial chamber of the tomb where spiritual rebirth and entry into the realm of intelligible light take place. The embalmer's workshop and the building in which the coffin and the statue of *ka* are made were also called *per nebu*. In this respect, it is useful to remember that the lector-priest attended an embalming process in the "house of beauty" (*per nefer*) where, under the direction of Anubis (or rather *heri seshet*, a priest who keeps the mysteries) and through the "hieratic art" of Thoth and Isis, the corpse (*khat*-body) is transformed into the ideal *sah*-body, the icon of its golden archetype.

Therefore, on the first pylon of the main temple of Isis in Philae, the inscription dating from the reign of Tiberius praises Imhotep as "master of life who gives it to everyone who loves him, by whom everyone lives… who vivifies people in the state of death, who brings up the egg, in the belly" (*PM* VI.217). His "philosophy" is that of life and resurrection, since he distributes everything which comes out of Geb and springs into life on the back of earth.

13. Amenhotep and Theology of Amun

Another exemplar sage, as an intermediary with Amun evolved to a god with an established cult, is Amenhotep, Son-of-Hapu, regarded as Imhotep's beloved brother. The Egyptian priests maintained that their "bodies are united completely".

Amenhotep was born about 1450 B.C. in the time of Tuthmosis III. He spent fifty years in his native town Athribis in Lower Egypt where he was the royal scribe and chief of the priests of Horus-Khentikheti. When the reigning pharaoh, Amenhotep III, invited Amenhotep to the royal court at Thebes (Uast), he became the chief architect and the first scribe, being responsible for building, mining, education, theology, hieratic sciences and cults, the organizer of the pharaoh's jubilees and "calculating everything". In the inscriptions carved on his statues Amenhotep addresses himself as a gnostic and theurgist:

"You go out to the sky and cross the brazen one; you are united with the stars, and one acclaims you in the boat of Ra." Therefore Amenhotep is "one with a hearing heart when he is looking for a plan in some unknown problem, like one whose heart knows it already; who finds a sentence even if it was destroyed; master of wisdom... one who guides the ignorant through the events since the primeval times, who shows their place to everybody who forgot about it; useful in his ideas, when he is looking for monuments to make immortal the name of his lord; who relates the proverb and acts with his fingers; leader of mankind..."[41]

Amenhotep, established as a great artist, builder of royal tombs and temples, sage and healer, was venerated by numerous followers during his lifetime as one who had surpassed the realm of mortals even before he died. He is depicted as an old man in large rounded wig and apron going up to his breast. In Ptolemaic times the papyrus roll and the scribe's palette are added to his insignia. The XXII Dynasty priest and supervisor of the doorway of the temple of Amun, named Hor-akh-bit, regards Amenhotep as one who knows "the secret powers in the writings of the past which date from the time of the ancestors" (*PM* II.103). He is credited (along with another later sage and antiquarian, Khaemwaset, son of Ramesses II and one of the high priests of Ptah in Memphis) as a founder of chapter 167 of the *Book of the Dead*:

"The book of one whose appearance is hidden, which was found by the pharaoh's chief lector-priest, Amenhotep, Son-of-Hapu, the justified (*maakheru*), and which he made himself as a protection for his limbs" (*Pap. Louvre* 3248).

The "architectural" wisdom of Amenhotep is related to the oracular revelations of Amun and the so-called eidetic or number-mysticism which provides a system of correspondences of shapes, colours, numbers, musical ratios, astronomical and alchemical processes in the cosmic liturgy of the Year, related to the rhythms of demiurgic descent and theurgic ascent. Within this mythical meta-structure of divine manifestations (*bau, kheperu*), the state is viewed as a temple of life-supporting creative Word, constituted by noetic sound and light, themselves turned into mantric chant and visible shape, thus regarding the manifested reality as a semiotic system where ontology becomes symbology. To a certain degree, musical definitions are theological, in accordance with Dio Cassius' account that the gods in Egypt are tones separated by fourths.[42]

The macrocosmic and microcosmic relationships are reflected on every level of being: even the coffin takes on the significance of a model of the cosmos. Therefore the afterlife *sah* body with shining golden skin is regarded as the restored *eikon* of the divine Form, *eidos*. If like is known only by like, to know the god who infuses the universe with the breath of life one must have something of that god within oneself. The cosmos is to be understood not by merely beholding it, but by tuning ourselves to its turning, to its eternal rhythms and transcendent principles, thereby realizing the hidden archetypal unity of all things at the level of Intellect, "Hidden in Name" (*amun ren-f*).

Ultimately, all things are "annihilated" at the level of Nun or the hidden Amun – the One not witnessed by anyone, because the One is not preceded by any god: "there is no other god with Him, who could say what He looks like". Therefore in the hymn of Amun (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.200) at first 1) the affirmative theology is introduced (declaring that Amun completed himself as Atum, his *ba* being in Heaven, his body in Duat, and his cult-image in Southern Heliopolis) and then 2) the negative theology is exposed (arguing that Amun is absolutely hidden and no statement about Him is possible).

The ineffable God is hidden both from the noetic gods and human beings: scriptures give no information about Him and He cannot be explained by any theory.[43] He is called *Ba* because there is no name for him: even "Amun" is not the real name of God. However, from the perspective of divine immanence, every name is a name of the ineffable Principle.

The term *ba*, according to J. Assmann, is used when the divinity (while remaining transcendent in itself) hidden behind the multitude of manifestations is meant, thereby indicating the invisible paradigm of manifestation. Therefore the visible world has the World-Soul (*Ba*, constituted by the multitude of particular souls and their *logoi*) which animates and moves it, the animated world itself being akin to the corporeal cosmic aspect of Ptah or Amun-Ptah, "just as it did for the Neoplatonists, who believed in the *anima mundi*. The parallel is not altogether artificial".[44] J. Assmann is correct in maintaining that there are strong connections between the Egyptian and Platonic concepts of the World-Soul, though in Plotinus the World-Soul itself derives from the hypostasis Soul which is the source of individual human souls as well.

When Amenhotep is regarded as a manifestation of Amun, it means that his own *ba* is realized as essentially identical with the divine *Ba*, sometimes depicted as a four-headed ram. This solar identity means the reintegration and union with Him who "gives his *bau* in millions (*hehu*) of forms", *hehu* standing for the limbs of his boundless theophanic body, manifested "in His name", i.e., according to the archetypal patterns. In the form of self-disclosing solar Intellect, God is "*hehu* whose limits are not known, Scarab (*kheper*) whose body is not known" (*Leiden stela* V.70). He proceeds like the omnipresent intelligible light of the One Alone who created the illustrious *bau* of all lower gods and humans (*Pap. Berlin* 3030.8-9).

Amenhotep becomes truly divine as the "follower of Thoth, born by the nobleman Hapu, son of Amun". Thus, in this sense, he *a priori* belongs to the solar chain (the Neoplatonic *seira*) which descends from the noetic realm. As the royal scribe, "the sage Amenhotep, son of the living herald Apis, priest of Amun, his beloved son, strong in his heart, issued from Seshat, divine offspring of Thoth", is called to keep the cosmic order (thus performing an avataric function) and to show the purified followers the way back to the solar barque of Amun-Ra.

Amenhotep's earthly father Hapu is interpreted as the sacred bull Apis and his mother as Hathor-Idit, the justified (*maakheru*), the god's mother. In addition to Apis and Hathor, Amenhotep has his initiatory spiritual parents, Thoth and Seshat (Sesheta). As a perfect gnostic, who realized his divine Self, Amenhotep is united with the archetypal *pleroma*, assimilated with Thoth, and, according to his divine rank, is portrayed as wearing the crescent and moon disk, thus becoming the "Theban Hermes". Accepted in the official Theban pantheon, he now delivers oracles himself and irradiates healing *barakah* from the beyond.

According to Porphyry, "Hermes with his golden staff – in reality *logos* – meets the soul and clearly points the way to the goal" (Stob. *Ecl.* I.51). Amenhotep performs the same function, therefore his followers and devotees hope to be united with Amenhotep and Imhotep in the afterlife, in order to move through the Osirian Duat – not as separate and illusory individual souls, but in the forms of their patrons, the *bau* of Amun that are united to God himself.

In the ancient Egyptian inscription on the coffin (*Cairo Catalogue gen.*6234), God, in his "Pythagorean" theological mask of the mathematician Thoth, says as follows:

> "I am One which transforms into Two.
> I am Two which transforms into Four.
> I am Four which transforms into Eight.
> After all this, I am One".

This successive procession starts from the Monad (which holds seminally the principles that are within all numbers), transformed into the infinity of the Dyad, called justice, Rhea and Isis by the Neopythagoreans. According to the Iamblichean *Theologumena of Arithmetic*, by naming the Monad "Proteus", the Pythagoreans follow the Egyptians, since "he was the demigod in Egypt who could assume any form and contained the properties of everything".[45]

The Tetrad represents "surface" and "four are the foundation of wisdom – arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy – ordered 1,2,3,4," according to Pythagoras.[46] The Octad produces volume, being the first actual cube, and the eight are called the "fathers and mothers of Ra", namely, the Ogdoad of Hermopolis hidden in the depths of Nun. This transcendent Ogdoad from its own seed makes a golden germ, putting it in the hidden lotus which flowers into being as the primordial noetic lotus of Ra, the principle of that divine light which constitutes the intelligible cosmos.

Therefore a son and follower of Thoth, being his microcosmic image, meditates upon the metaphysical unity and beholds the formal order which springs forth from the incomprehensible Oneness and which returns back to its supreme Source.

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28 Ibid., p.138

29 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt*, p.170

30 Ibid., p.446

31 Jeremy Naydler, ibid., p.196

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1. The Ramesside Icon and Three Hypostases of Plotinus

The Egyptian civilization as a semantic universe is based on metaphysical principles. Therefore being is understood in terms of divine irradiations arranged as a semiotic meta-structure of *neteru* and their dynamic forces which are not acting at random but reproduce their spiritual archetypes and cultic paradigms. The mathematics and mythology of heavens translate themselves into the realm of sensible images, establishing an exact correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, as if all things exist by imitation of archetypes, numbers, and divine precedents.

The world of *neteru* and *akhu,* keeping its permanent structure and ideal form, brings structure to language and provides an adequate iconography, thus rendering this world intelligible. "Here" and "there" like *entautha* and *ekei* in the philosophy of Plotinus, are clearly distinct. However, the different ontological realms are completely integrated and governed by the laws of the same noetic patterns and the same *maat,* truth and justice. The course of the sun and its liturgic rhythms, turned into a "sacred text" and "hieratic icon", constitute the immanent mystery of transformation and solar rebirth, functioning as a model of life and its death-transcending philosophy aimed at solar immortalization (*apathanatismos*).

The ritualized process of transfigurations (*sakhu*) is crucial and is supported by *akhu,* the illuminative power of the sacred world. "Who knows this" and "who does this" (i.e., lives according to intellect, *akh,* and its archetypal patterns) "is an image of the great God", proclaim the New Kingdom texts. Knowledge (*gnosis*) includes 1) an esoteric knowledge of one's supreme identity and 2) a knowledge of the sacred rituals that maintain the cosmic order and harmony. This knowledge is turned into a cultic, philosophical, social, and political *praxis.* J. Assmann says:

"The universe is not only interpreted in terms of divine acts, as a ritual celebrated by the gods: this interpretation is itself also staged as ritual".[1]

Both the Egyptian theology in its different branches and Neoplatonism (as well as the entire Orphico-Pythagorean tradition) agree that human participation, involving rites (*teletai*) and intellections (*noeseis*), is essential to the divine scheme of sustaining the world which itself is the manifestation of divine energies (*dunameis, sekhemu*). The search for the origin and meaning of things (*ta pragmata*), both in philosophy and sacred rites, means the contemplation of the eternal truth of reality and the ascent to the divine, thus recollecting one's primordial archetypal identity.

In the early Ramesside period (c.1290 B.C.) text it is stated that "the god of this land is the sun in the sky. [Only] his symbols (i.e., the divine statues) are on earth." (*Pap. Boulaq* 4.7.15-16). The priests of the New

Kingdom and Late period were already thinking along the same lines as Proclus when he said that "all things are presented in logical order, as being symbols of divine orders of being" (*In Parm.* VI.1062).

According to the solar theology of Amun-Ra and Neoplatonic metaphysics, by means of images the microcosmic eyes of the soul (*hoi tes psuches ophtalmoi*), which at their own ontological level imitate the divine Eyes, are able to see the gods in the luminous (*augoeide*) garments of their souls. The *bau* of the gods not only enter the material images produced in accord with the strict rules of hieratic iconography, but they may appear as visions (depending on the soul's receptive capacity, *epitedeiotes,* and on the semantics of the already established world-picture) in an interior space of imagination. When the Egyptian priest contemplates the sacred image of the god, he feels the invisible power (*sekhem*) that irradiates from the beautifully decorated and "animated" statue along with aromas of incense and oil. If occasionally the god appears in its epiphanic form as a vision experienced by the initiated, he manifests the same tremendous power and radiance. Therefore Proclus says:

"The gods themselves are incorporeal, but since those who see them possess bodies, the visions which issue from the gods to worthy recipients possess a certain quality from the gods who send them but also have something connatural (*sungenes*) with those who see them... However, because visions emit divine light, possess effectiveness, and portray the powers of the gods through their visible symbols, they remain in contact with the gods who send them. This is why the ineffable symbols of the gods are expressed in images and are projected sometimes in one form, sometimes in another" (*In Remp.* I.39.5-17).

The Ramesside picture from the *Book of Gates* (division 12, tomb of Ramesses VI, c.1143-1136 B.C.) may be interpreted as a symbolic representation of those metaphysical principles which later became the three divine hypostases of Plotinus (A.D.204-270). The icon shows Nun as a personified figure raising in his hands the solar barque. The Egyptians usually depicted the gods, especially Ra in his various forms, as travelling in such boats. The ceremonial barques were used for cultic purposes. Two barques of Ra, namely, *Mandjet* and *Mesket* are frequently depicted upon the sky hieroglyph *pet* and the lake, or pool, hieroglyph *she.* By lifting the barque (*wia*) of Ra, the luminous space (Shu), or initial noetic "place" (symbolized by Heliopolis), is established and manifested within the Ocean which contains in itself the unmanifested primordial Egg of *kosmos noetos.* Due to this theogonic act of lifting the retinue of gods, the whole intelligible cosmos is manifested in its archetypal form. The scarab beetle Ra-Khepera in the sacred barque is the form of Ra, the solar Creator, who comes into being (*kheper*), the term *kheperu* meaning theophanies, irradiations, manifestations.

In the upper part of the same icon from the *Book of Gates* we see the body of Osiris arched round in a circle and also surrounded by the uniform Waters. His arms support the goddess Nut (Heaven), who stands upside down and holds the sun disk (*aten*) – the supreme symbol of the intelligible Light. Two inscriptions run as follows:

"This is Osiris, he encircles the Duat" and "This is Nut, she receives Ra".

The visible and invisible sun played a central role in the theurgic cult. Therefore G. Shaw argues that "theurgic mysteries were solar mysteries".[2] and the sun's light-giving power "was far more than a conceptual analogue of the noetic Demiurge, it was a *sunthema* of the One itself".[3]

Following the Neoplatonic reading, Nun should be regarded as the One (*to hen*), the supreme ineffable source of everything. The solar Ra (or Atum-Ra) is the divine Intellect (*Nous*), and his sacred barque, which carries the standing gods, constitutes and symbolizes the articulated noetic cosmos of divine Ideas, light-like intellects and intelligible principles (*archai, theoi*). Osiris encircles the Duat – the subtle interworld of the divine Soul in her universal and macrocosmic aspect. Thus, the three Plotinian hypostases of the divine reality, as presented, for instance, in *Enn.* V.1, are made complete. Presumably, the physical world should be located inside the Osirian circle.

The same ideas, sometimes involving different metaphysical divisions, may be expressed using a great many different mythical images and theological constructions. Plotinus also argues that the universe lies in Soul which is analogous to Osiris or Isis-Hathor in her form of the celestial Cow. The Soul, *Ba* of Amun, or the breath of Shu on the psychic Osirian level, "bears it (universe) up and nothing is without a share of soul. It is as if a net immersed in the waters was alive, but unable to make its own that in which it is. The sea is already spread out and the net spreads with it, as far as it can; for no one of its parts can be anywhere else than where it lies" (*Enn.* IV.3.9.36-42).

The image of a net reaching from Heaven to Earth is described in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, chapter 153a. Just as the One (the primeval Ocean of Nun) contains the eternal world of Ideas and everything else, so the eternal divine world (the Osirian circle, itself transcended by the circle of Ra) contains the temporal world. According to A. Hilary Armstrong:

"It seems that we are inside that great animal whose tracks we see everywhere in this world. But of course, as we are *psuche*, we also are that animal, and, if we are considering where to look for it in our present circumstances, we can say that it is inside us".[4]

Like the supreme ineffable One in Neoplatonism, Nun is usually described in negative terms. It is dark, formless, and inert transcendent potentiality for Being, Life, and creative solar Intelligence. Whereas the Osirian Duat and the solar barque of Ra harbour psychic and spiritual forms, all forms are dissolved in the utterly formless and dark "waters" of Nun, in the abyss of Beyond-Being which transcends all categories of knowledge and can be described only in negative terms. This mode of expression is utilized by both the Ramesside negative theology of Amun (elaborated during the XIX Dynasty: 1295-1188 B.C.) and the Neopythagorean mysticism which flourished more than twelve centuries later in Ptolemaic and Roman Alexandria.

2. Back to One's Native Star

For the ancient Egyptian theologians, the fabric of being is woven of *medu neter*, divine words and pictures, manifested on different levels of God's self-disclosure. Regarded as *medu-neter*, the hieroglyphs (in Greek *hieros* meaning sacred, *gluphe* – carving) were not arbitrary signs, but both 1) invisible Ideas and 2) their visible semiotic icons which sprang from the mouth of God and pointed to the archetypal and ontological connections that lay in the nature of things.

In some respects, hieroglyphs constitute the meaningful tapestry of existence and its arranged formal characteristics. Carved and painted hieroglyphs are the sensible reflections and images of the true "hieroglyphs" at the level of divine Forms embraced in the divine Intellect of Atum-Ra. Therefore the God-given script shows the real faces of things, their *eide*, and reveals the play of their interconnections, all of which find their best expression in mystical "etymography" rather than "etymology", the latter being appreciated by the Greek grammarians and their modern successors in the field of philology. The exclusive emphasis on etymology is based on faith in the revelatory character of spoken language, but not on multi-coloured visual symbols and graphic icons which explicitly constitute the mysterious coherence of the universe.

In this respect, the signs of the Egyptian script were regarded as images of the words of creation, conceived and uttered by Ptah and recorded by Thoth. Since the symbolic script of the priests was viewed as an imitation of divine demiurgy, it also had a theurgic function and sacramental elevating power, revealed, for example, through inscriptions and decorations on the temple walls of the Late period, when the entire body of cultic knowledge was erected in a form of an architectural edifice, equivalent to the archetypal Book with its own symbolic grammar.

The Book of Forms was written by Thoth at the beginning of manifestations and this Book is permanent in the noetic cosmos, while being endlessly repeated in the realm of psychosomatic compositions and their particular destinies. In the *Coffin Texts* the deceased says:

"I am one of the ministrants of the Master of Things, he who keeps the Books of Forms" (*CT* 335).

R. T. Rundle Clark argues that, in accordance with the Egyptian concept of Forms, this "quasi-philosophical idea" can be expanded to mean stages of development, species and visible signs.[5] The Platonic doctrine acknowledges "that one kind of being is the form which is always the same, uncreated and indestructible, never receiving anything into itself from without, nor itself going out to any other, but invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which the contemplation is granted to intelligence only" (*Tim.*51e-52a). This doctrine is already present and elaborated in the Egyptian theological system.

Terrestrial Egypt (which symbolized the entire world as such) and all elements of its topography are regarded as an image of celestial Egypt. The land of Kemet is an image of the divine Paradigm, visualized and represented by the skies where the heavenly Nile flows and divine beings sail the waters.

The Pythagorean and Platonic teaching assuming that stars were souls or their archetypal abodes (if not the shining archetypes themselves) has its Egyptian prototype explicitly evolved from the Pyramid age. For the Platonists, *aither* (skr. *akasha*) is the stuff of which the soul, or rather its stellar vehicle, is made, *aither* being the subtle substance that the animated universe is said to breathe, i.e., the "speech" which emerged from the mouth of Atum as the life-giving breath of Shu. The element of air is the *ba* of Shu. In the *Book of the Dead* (spell 38a for living by air in the realm of the dead) the deceased says:

"I am Atum who ascended from the Abyss to the Celestial Waters. I have taken my seat in the West and I give orders to the spirits whose seats are hidden, for I am the Double Lion, and acclamation is made to me in the barque of Khepera. I eat in it and have become strong thereby, I live in it on air, and I drink in the barque of Ra" (*BD* 38a).

Stars are the abode of the dead, since the soul has an existence separate from the mortal body. *Ba* is to Heaven, *khat* – to earth. According to the Orphic initiate:

"I am child of earth and of starry heaven, but my real nature is of heaven alone" (*OF* 32b).

This idea, like so much in early afterlife systems of the Upanishads and in the Orphic teachings, is first attested in Egyptian texts. According to Plato, the fixed stars were created as divine and eternal animals, ever abiding and revolving after the same manner (*Tim.*40b). Therefore every soul returns to its native star. For Egyptians, "to become a star" is a goal of the theurgic ascent modelled on the *mir'aj* of the king, son of Ra. Stars, being visible symbols of the noetic Ideas, are spiritual faces of the transformed souls of the dead and are considered to be gods (*neteru*), because the divinized souls are counted as gods. The soul of a gnostic even takes on the role of the Creator, the Lord of All, by taking hold of His attributes, showing that He is the Lord of Life, and participating in the demiurgic work of the Creator.

The iconography of the gods is built as a system of symbolic allusions to the essential nature and function of metaphysical principles which direct the demiurgic work accomplished through *medu neter*. Therefore the hieroglyphs themselves are called "gods" and individual signs of the script are equated with particular gods. The gods inhabit *medu neter*, that is hieroglyphs, like their cult images which are produced in the same form as hieroglyphs. The semiology of the gods themselves (their classes, ranks, epiphanies, interconnections, functions, separations and unifications) is no less than a way of "writing" reality, of producing the manifested tapestry of divine names and attributes.

The ontological *heka* power of demiurgy and "magic" can operate only through the special names. Every name (*ren*), as a manifested "face" of Atum, the plenitude of noetic realities, has its efficient substance and power to shape certain particular things. Hence, names constitute the essential nature of all living entities, being a sort of "nourishment" and the chief mark of their identity. Therefore every name, epithet, or visible image enhances the real presence of the god or of any particular being designated by that name and depicted by that image. The extent of divine names applied to a god indicates the horizon of his presence and the scope of his influence.

When the realm of names is transcended by the gnostic, he enters the ineffable silence. Similarly, the king at the end of his theurgic ascent is assimilated to the supreme God and this union is confirmed by saying that "his Mother does not know his name" (*PT* 394c).

3. Archetypal Foundation of Hieroglyphic Signs and Colours

In Egyptian theology, Nun is sometimes equated to the primordial Snake, called Most Ancient One, or Provider of Attributes (*Neheb-kau*), who held all subsequent creation within his folds. This Snake is not originally distinct from Atum, the keeper of a hidden plenitude of the Forms. Insofar as Atum makes a place for himself within the Snake's coils, he begins to define himself as something distinct from Nun, thus coming forth as the intelligible *ben-ben* stone, the condensed Being itself. By "bending right around himself" and "making a place in the midst of his coils" (*CT* 321), Atum introduces the archetypal foundation for a series of subsequent creative acts.

Damascius, the last "successor" (*diadochos*) of the Neoplatonic Academy in Athens, also speaks about the hypercosmic abyss, or sanctuary of silence (*De princip.* I.84), which summarizes in itself all worlds (ibid. III.91). This Orphic Night is the realm of yet unmanifested birth-pangs of the noetic Form. Below this *apeiron*, not subject to procession and numbering, is located the cause of Being, itself beyond essence (*ousia*) and intellection (*noesis*).

For Damascius, "the archetypal and perennial man" (*ho koinos kai aidios anthropos*) is the paradigm of the species and the goal of all existence. We are images of the noetic entities and effigies of the unknown divine *sunthemata*. However, hyper-ignorance (*huperagnosia*) is our natural state of mind, according to Damascius (*De princip.* I.84). This metaphysical ignorance is a direct inheritance from the ineffable Beyond-Being which is known through non-intellectual means: through forgetting of all philosophical notions, rejecting all definitions, emptying of the mind and, in a state of complete passivity (being like the corpse of Osiris when the individual self is annihilated), receiving a glimpse of transcendence which promises mystical union.

On its own psychic level of the interworld (*barzakh,* to use the Sufi term), the mummy of Osiris reflects the primordial inertness and is represented as a prone figure without any distinguishing marks. In this state he is called aru, "form" in a general and passive sense, as a "dead shape" which yet needs to be awakened and "informed" by the active and life-giving "form" of Ra. The shapes of things have an immense symbolic importance for the ancient Egyptians, to whom visible form was an image of the invisible *eidos.*

R. H. Wilkinson even discerned primary and secondary levels of association in the symbolism of form. In primary association, the form of a thing suggests concepts, ideas, or identities with which this thing is directly related, namely, the specific gods and concepts connected with that particular deity. In the secondary association, the form of a thing suggests another different form which has its own symbolic significance.[6]

The form is inseparable from colour and other qualitative properties. Therefore the colour of any object is viewed as an integral part of its nature, its inner and outer being. The term *iwen,* signifying colour, is virtually synonymous with substance, nature, being, external appearance, character. Regarded as an immutable aspect of reality, colours (along with shapes, their lines, sounds, and proportions) are used in the Egyptian ritual practice and art to reveal 1) the essential nature of the object portrayed and 2) the close relationship between colour and being itself.

Accordingly, colour has both theurgic and magic significance. For the Egyptian alchemists, the valuable properties of stones and metals are largely ascribed to their colours: they reveal the inner nature of different metals and indicate the states of their transmutation, analogous to those by which the soul is transformed. Since colour was regarded as a form of activity or *pneuma* (the breath of Shu) which could be removed from one substance and infused into another, the conception of "tinctures" (*baphikai*) plays an important role in the process of alchemical work. The colour of plants was viewed as their *pneuma.* According to the famous alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis (Akhmim):

"Demokritos has named as substances four bodies: that is, copper, iron, tin, lead... All these substances are employed in the Two Tinctures [of gold and silver]. All the substances have been recognized by the

Egyptians as produced by lead alone. For it is from lead that the other three bodies come".[7]

Taking lead as a sort of primary matter, the first problem in trying to turn it into other metals (as in the attempt to transform the mortal darkness of *khat* into the immortal golden light of *sah*) was to change its colour.

Each hieroglyph is a small symbolic image and has its own colour or combination of colours related to different divine qualities. The connection between written signs (or images) and larger, representational images (which our modern culture identifies as "objects of art") is also very strong. Therefore individual hieroglyphic signs are viewed as the models for parts and whole compositions of art which translate *medu neter* into objects of daily use, furniture, painting, reliefs, sculpture in the round, and architecture. Understood in this sense, all products of sacred art and craft are prolongations of "the god's words". They are ontological and cultic manifestations of Ptah.

This interaction or oscillation between writing and pictorial representation, between image and text, means that they represent the same inner reality, both being *medu neter*. In fact, the same word refers to hieroglyphic writing, drawing and painting. Both images and texts are referred to indiscriminately as a "script" which is revealed by Thoth. Therefore there are no boundaries between written signs and iconic signs. As R. H. Wilkinson pointed out:

"The hieroglyphic signs do form the very basis of Egyptian iconography, which – just like the written inscriptions – is concerned with the practical functions of making a clear and often specific symbolic statement".[8]

In all traditional cultures, the symbolism is viewed as inherent in forms themselves, to the extent that a symbol is in a certain sense that to which it gives expression, namely, the *ba* of the god.

4. Divine Ideas and Symbols

The so-called Platonic theory of Ideas is not Plato's invention; the concept of the relationship between intelligible archetypes and their images has been central to Egyptian and Mesopotamian thought from its early beginnings. What is new is the rationalization of this theory and its separation from the initial mythical frame and "theurgic integrality", thus adapting it to dialectical logocentrism and to the taste of contemporary Sophists. However, if it is reduced merely to the level of an abstract dianoetic reasoning and its mental "universals", this "theory" is impoverished and becomes involved in the endless quarrel about realities that cannot be fully revealed to the discursive mind and therefore appear as logical contradictions. The symbolic "language" of photagogic visions, images, colours, scents and liturgical sounds is diminished or neglected in favour of monopolistic rational discourse. Although the scope of this discourse is limited, its metaphysical pretensions are absolute. Thus, the whole discussion about Ideas becomes too anthropocentric and restricted to the dimension of human speech.

This passionate belief in the omnipotent power of rationality and its categories is itself irrational, because an intellectual truth is not available for transmission in any discursive form. The structure of spoken language is unsuitable for expressing certain higher truths and realities. Simplicius in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* argues that even if the categories are employed semantically to refer to actual things, it is better to view them not as realities but as conceptual entities (*noemata*) that symbolize, or are images of, genuine substances (*sumbolon ousa tes en tois ousin ousias: In Categ.*11.19).

Speech is an outermost activity of the soul fallen into embodiment, therefore philosophy, restricted to rational discursive thinking, presents the greatest hindrance to the apprehension of the divine truth and the transcendent Forms. Hieroglyphs, *medu neter*, are symbols and images for contemplation: they function as a means of elevation. In this respect, they are analogous to the Neoplatonic "divine synthemes" (*sunthemata*), that is, the theurgic tokens of the noetic realm.

The Chaldean and Neoplatonic *sunthemata* also signify a symbol used in rituals, because the cosmogenesis itself is staged as a rite performed by the gods. The process of descent and ascent by means of symbols (*sumbola, sunthemata*) and hieroglyphs constitutes the way which *ba* traverses: the soul moves through Duat as if crossing the dynamic semiotic field, or the "Osirian book", made of names and ontological attributes of identity. The manifested reality itself is a construction built up of *medu neter*. It is only at the level of human senses that the "divine words" are crystallized into an iconic script and items of sacred art. According to Proclus, who regarded the soul itself as the special token (like the animated statue or hieroglyph) of the One, aimed at eventual assimilation with God:

"The soul is composed of the intellectual words and from the divine *sumbola*, some of which are from the intellectual ideas, while others are from the divine henads. And we are in fact icons of the intellectual realities, and we are statues of the unknowable *sunthemata*" (*Phil. Chald.*5.8-11).

While understood as a hieroglyph, as a "word" which comes forth from the mouth of Atum, the *ba* may be viewed as a textual element of the larger ontological "text" which is *kheperu*, the theophanic reality itself. The human *ba* is depicted as a figure of a human-headed bird, usually a falcon, thus becoming a sign-image moving within the initiatory "text", constituted of other figures, symbols, and images, since the ascent takes place through the disclosure of divine names, the elements of divine speech, *medu neter*. As Proclus says:

"Every god is without figure, even though it is viewed with a figure. For the figure is not in it, but it is part of it, since the seer is incapable of seeing without figure that which is with figure, but that which is seen in a figured way corresponds to the nature of the seer" (*In Remp.* I.40.1-4).

Therefore the soul, seeing the figures depicted in the imagination and being struck by their beauty, is admiring those Ideas from which they are derived. However, the highest initiation (into the transcendence of Amun, or Atum) takes place not by means of rational discrimination or intellection, but by means of all-surpassing silence:

"Initiation (*muesis*) and revelation (*epopteia*) are themselves symbols (*sumbolon*) of the ineffable silence and of the unity with the intelligible by the method of mystic revelations" (*Plat. Theol.* IV.9.193.15-16).

According to S. Rappe, "the highest form of Neoplatonic hermeneutics might posit philosophy as, in the last result, mere fiction".[9] This radical attitude is established by Damascius, who criticized not only the metaphysical premises of Procline philosophy, but discursivity as such, in his attempt to promote a radical non-dual way to the darkness of Nun, the Ineffable:

"Now knowledge takes place by means of intuitive seeing, or by means of syllogism, or it is just a diluted and obscure sort of vision that sees things from a distance, as it were, but which nevertheless relies on logical necessity, or else, [knowledge is] simply a specious form of reasoning that doesn't even have access from afar, but simply conceives of certain ideas on the basis of other ideas. By means of such thinking, we habitually recognize material order or privation or in general that which has no reality" (*De princip.* I.67).

However, as T. Burckhardt pointed out, even if spirituality (understood both in an apophatic sense and as a perennial wisdom which transcends its formal vehicles) is independent of forms, this in no way implies that it can be expressed and transmitted by any and every sort of form.[10] One should add that without form it cannot be transmitted at all, because the transcendent divine Reality is above any human comprehension and experience. If the style of "sacred art", which sustains the spirituality of every traditional civilization, is perpetuated by the power of the immanent spirit and therefore cannot be imitated from outside, it means that the "theory of Ideas" may be expressed in different ways supported by different revelations. The Egyptian tradition of *medu neter* could not be translated into the rational discourse of the Greeks without losing its essential characteristics and esoteric meanings, imbued in the forms, shapes, colours, and accompanying rituals themselves. T. Burckhardt says:

"Through its qualitative essence form has a place in the sensible order analogous to that of truth in the intellectual order; this is the significance of the Greek notion of *eidos*. Just as a mental form such as a dogma or a doctrine can be the adequate, albeit limited, reflection of a Divine Truth, so can a sensible form retrace a truth or a reality which transcends both the plane of sensible forms and the plane of thought".[11]

5. Symbolic Interpretation of Hieroglyphic Script

Modern scholars think that Plotinus utterly misunderstood the function and essence of Egyptian hieroglyphs. However, Plotinus simply reflects the tradition of Egyptians themselves. This tradition, at least from the so-called "Ethiopian-Saite renaissance" (760-525 B.C.), laid foundations for the later Alexandrian schools of philology and elaborated the theory of the symbolic, or cryptographic, aspect of hieroglyphic script which is unrelated to conventional phonetic meanings. Along with the hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic scripts there is the fourth category of script, namely, "symbolic". The rare instances of purposely enigmatic inscriptions date from the Old Kingdom, but only in Ptolemaic times did the boundaries between normal hieroglyphic script and enigmatic and symbolic cryptography become blurred. Plotinus faithfully conveys the priestly theory when he says:

"The true wisdom, then, is substance, and the true substance is wisdom (*he ara alethine sophia ousia, kai he alethine ousia sophia*); and the worth of substance comes from wisdom, and it is because it comes from wisdom that it is true substance. Therefore all the substances which do not possess wisdom, because they have become substance on account of some wisdom but do not possess wisdom in themselves, are not true substances. One must not then suppose that the gods or the 'exceedingly blessed spectators' in the higher world contemplate propositions, but all the Forms we speak about are beautiful images (*kala agalmata*) in that world, of the kind which someone imagined to exist in the soul of the wise man, images not painted but real (*agalmata de ou gegrammena, alla onta*). This is why the ancients said that the Ideas were realities and substances.

"The wise men of Egypt (*hoi Aiguption sophoi*), I think, also understood this, either by scientific (*episteme*) or innate knowledge, and when they wished to signify something wisely (*dia sophias*), did not use the forms of letters which follow the order of words and propositions and imitate sounds and the enunciations of philosophical statements, but by drawing images (*agalmata*) and inscribing in their temples one particular image (*agalma*) of each particular thing, they manifested the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom (*episteme kai sophia hekaston estin agalma*) and is a subject of statements, all together in one, and not of discourse or deliberation. But [only] afterwards [others] discovered, starting from it in its concentrated unity, a representation in something else, already unfolded and speaking it discursively and giving the reasons why things are like this..." (*Enn.* V.8.5.15-6.12).

To read the enigmatic surface of the script which transcends ordinary conventions requires not only an inner calmness and concentration of mind, but also the metaphysical knowledge of analogies and associations.

When a sign is both a script character and a pictorial figure, or divine symbol for contemplation, a certain degree of polysemy is achieved and, as a result of the iconic nature of hieroglyph, the Eye of the soul is opened. Spiritual hermeneutics at their summit become an imaginative pursuit which leads to inner vision and the experience of divine presence. J. Assmann thinks that a similar kind of polysemy characterises arabesque or ornamentalized Arabic script:

"In Egyptian calligraphy, the equivalent to the Arab-Islamic ornament is the figural composition".[12]

In Late period Egypt, written knowledge, itself inseparable from the rites, is embodied and presented as a complicated system of temple or tomb decoration, and is gradually turned into a secret lore, partly concealed by aesthetic forms of sacred art. The elements of beauty and their metaphysical truth, as well as "the almost magical relationship" between the adequate symbol and the sacramental presence of prototype are thoroughly discussed by F. Schuon. He says:

"Furthermore, as Plotinus remarked, every element of beauty or harmony is a mirror or receptacle which attracts the spiritual presence to its form or colour, if one may so express it; if this applies as directly as possible to sacred symbols, it is also true, in a less direct and more diffuse way, in the case of all things that are harmonious and therefore true. Thus, an artisan ambience made of sober beauty – for there is no question of sumptuousness except in very special cases – attracts or favours *barakah*, "blessing"; not that it creates spirituality any more than pure air creates health, but it is at all events in conformity with it, which is much, and which, humanly, is the normal thing".[13]

The rich repertory of iconic signs and the number of ways to read and understand them grew immensely in the Late period Egypt. Therefore the esoterically transformed script became accessible only to initiated priests. J. Assmann says:

"The mistake of the Greeks was not that they interpreted hieroglyphic script as a secret code rather than a normal writing system. The Egyptians had in fact transformed it into a secret code and so described it to the Greeks. The real misunderstanding of the Greeks was to have failed to identify the aesthetic significance of cryptography as calligraphy".[14]

This more symbolic than conventional interpretation of script is related to the metaphysical pursuits of XXV-XXVI Dynasty theologians. At that time, the Egyptian version of the so-called theory of Ideas – the theory which naturally stems from the New Kingdom doctrines of the creative *Logos* and *ba* theology – became more explicit. Shabaka, the pharaoh of Ethiopian origin, who ascended the throne in 716 B.C., and his successor Shebiktu made attempts to revive the Old Kingdom Memphite traditions through a comprehensive programme of cultic renewal and theological *paideia*, aimed at a restoration of metaphysical paradigms and holiness of the land. The image of the past "golden age" was raised into the rank of a normative model for the present, emphasizing the importance of divine archetypes embodied and mirrored in the script itself.

The Ethiopian restoration continued the cosmogonical, or cratogonical, traditions of the Ramesside Ptah theology, making attempts to reveal their hieratic value and inner meaning. The king's piety is shown as having a paradigmatic value: the "philosophical" purity, devotion, and wisdom of the ruling pharaoh bestows blessings on the whole of Egypt, holiest of lands, as if translating the energy of noetic archetypes into their ritual receptacles, that is, sacred landscapes, cities (which are regarded as holy places able to transcend death), temples and the hearts of men. And these blessings, irradiated by the restorer of the "golden age", are "interpreted as a return to the primal condition, when the creator himself ruled over creation".[15]

According to J. Assmann, the Memphite paradigms of renewal shaped the theological systems of Late period temples, 1) establishing the metaphysical and semiotic triad of thought, word, and written sign and 2) developing a kind of "thing-script" whose signs are coextensive with the totality of things in the cosmos.[16] These concepts were not invented but only reformulated and re-emphasized, since in the Old and Middle Kingdoms the manifestation of being was already regarded as a set of wordplay coming from the mouth of Atum.

However, until the rise of the new solar theologies of the XVIII Dynasty (1550-1295 B.C.), only the gods, i.e., the hierarchy of noetic archetypes themselves, not the entire world, are said to come forth from the mouth of the Creator, and the role of hieroglyphs in the subsequent manifestation is not explicitly emphasized. J. Assmann maintains that elevation of hieroglyphic script, as a purely sacred medium able to exhibit the visual faces of Forms, coextensive with the totality of things, is the most "modern" feature of the Memphite theology which may be compared to the account of *Genesis* (2.20) of the collaboration of God and Adam in Paradise.[17]

6. Return to the Golden Age and Paradigms to be Imitated

The Egyptian alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis interpreted Adam as Thouth: "the First Man, who is Thouth among us" is named Adam, "with a name borrowed from the tongue of angels", by the Chaldeans, Parthians, Medes, and Hebrews. This Thouth of Zosimus is also equated with the Assyrian Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, the Egyptian Osiris, [the Alexandrian Thoth] and the Hellenic Hermes. The four letters or elements (*stoicheia*), which constitute the name Adam, are explained as follows: 1) A expresses the rising sun, air; 2) D expresses the setting sun, earth; 3) the second A expresses the north, water; 4) M expresses the maturing fire. Zosimus continues:

"Thus it is that the sensual Adam is named Thouth according to the external patterning. As for the man who is inside Adam, the spiritual man, he has simultaneously a personal and a universal name… His universal name is *Phos* (Light)."[18]

Since the world is created by the Word, Adam or Thouth (who is anthropomorphized following the initial pattern of Ptah as Macranthropos, an image inherited by the Gnostic traditions and Zosimus) read from intelligible "things" (the Neoplatonic *ta pragmata*, meaning, first of all, noetic realities). These intelligible things are then uttered in the naming the naming of appropriate objects.

The XXV Dynasty of the Ethiopian pharaohs roughly coincide with the Homeric epoch and the so-called "orientalizing period" in Greece (approximately 750-650 B.C.), when Eastern skills, images, and wisdom teachings were transmitted. The Assyrian expansion to the Mediterranean area along the trade system controlled by the Phoenicians and the Egyptian programme of restoration provided a historical framework for the movement of Oriental craftsmen, the Kadmean alphabet and metaphysical ideas of *Logos* to Greece. As J. Breasted pointed out, the Memphite theological conception of the cosmos

"forms quite a sufficient basis for suggesting that the later notion of *nous* and *logos*, hitherto supposed to have been introduced into Egypt from abroad at a much later date, were present at this early period. Thus the Greek tradition of the origin of their philosophy in Egypt undoubtedly contains more of the truth than has in recent years been conceded… The habit, later so prevalent among the Greeks, of interpreting philosophically the functions of the Egyptian gods… had already begun in Egypt before the earliest Greek philosophers were born; and it is not impossible that Greek practice of the interpretation of their own gods received its first impulse from Egypt".[19]

When the pharaoh Psammetichus I by 663 B.C. was able to shake off the Assyrian yoke and start the XXVI Saite Dynasty (664-525 B.C.), Egypt (instead of the cities of Syria and Phoenicia, partly ruined by the Assyrians) became the most important place for Greek mercenaries and seekers of wisdom. According to W. Burkert, even before the Saite period the Greeks were strongly influenced in their religion, literature, and art by the Eastern models, introduced by the itinerant seers and priests of purification, migrating "craftsmen of the sacred" who transmitted their divinatory skills, mythological motifs, and wisdom.[20]

These seers and healers are the direct predecessors of the Orphic and Dionysiac "craftsmen" – those who made the sacred their craft (*technai*) and who adhered to the cathartic and "philosophical" way of life, *telestikos kai mantikos bios,* based on ritual therapies and esoteric teachings of liberation. As in the later Hermetic and Hellenic philosophy, the role of spiritual "father" who transmits knowledge to his "son" through initiation is strongly emphasized.

This transmission of the telestic crafts and mysteries is simply a prolongation of the ancient practices (now detached from the temples), both Mesopotamian and Egyptian in their origins. The Codex of Hammurapi already designated the true craftsman as *mar ummani*, "son of the master craftsman". Likewise the Phoenician seer describes himself as "the knowing one, son of the master craftsman" (*mudu, mar ummami*). The same is true of the craft tradition of Ptah and Imhotep. Their wisdom is esoteric and can be revealed only to the initiates belonging to the same sacred "family" (*genos*).

The Saite period Egypt (664-525 B.C.) became the school for the Greek *sophoi* to the same degree as Islamic Spain for the Medieval European philosophers and scientists. At the same time the pursuit of a codification of ancient memories and the creation of the patterns of a normative past became central: from Assyria, where a comprehensive collection and philological edition of Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian texts took place, to Greece, where the normative Homeric corpus was formed. The mythical Exodus traditions were selected and canonized at the same time, following the Assyrian and Babylonian examples.

The Houses of Life which flourished during the Saite period laid foundations for the later tradition of philology and allegorical exegesis, shaping, in a sense, that image of a mysterious and holy Egypt which prevailed in Ptolemaic and Roman times. This image of an age-old wisdom was supported by the visible and immediately accessible "past" in temples, memorials and books, experienced as the divine presence in the eternal "here and now".

This thoroughly sacralized, archaized (in a classicist sense), canonized, and ritualized Egypt with its "almost theatrical"[21] cultural forms – not arbitrarily chosen but consciously related to the ancient prototypes – was encountered by Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato. It is therefore no wonder that Plato's theory of Forms and intelligible Numbers, along with his respect for the great past recorded by the Saite priests ("O Solon, Solon, you Hellenes are never anything but children": *Tim.*22b), derived from 1) the ancient Egyptian sources related to the theory of *medu neter* as well as 2) the Mesopotamian doctrine of *me*.

The categories called *me* are the efficacious paradigms of all things and creative symbols of power, possessed by An (Heaven), or Enlil, or Ea (Enki, an equivalent of Ptah). The Sumerian god Enki was the lord of primordial Waters (*apsu*), wisdom, theurgic tokens and incantations, all arts and crafts, poetry and magic. The Sumerian *me* (rendered by Akkadian *parsu*) are attributes or powers of the gods (like Egyptian *bau* and *sekhemu*), acting as articulating, organizing, and educating forces. A related term *gish-hur* (plan, design), denotes how these ideal paradigms are to be imitated and embodied.

7. Hieratic Myths and Symbols

For Plato's Socrates, myths must be subjected to interpretation in a way that assists self-knowledge. This means that, instead of studying the historical traditions of myth-making, one is asked to interpret myths non-literally and regard them as a complex mirror of divine and human realities. This mirror allows the philosopher-exegete (*hermeneus*) or the sacred scribe (*hierogrammateus*) to identify himself with the events narrated in the story – their mythical paradigms, images, and symbols which operate in a non-discursive way and are able to elevate the interpreter to first principles.

According to Hellenic Neoplatonists, there are different kinds of myth. The highest theological myths are those which do not attach themselves to any material object, but regard the actual natures of the gods: they are "divine" (*theioi*) because they are used by the gods (*theoi*). The gods themselves in oracles have employed myths. According to Sallustius, who followed Iamblichus in this respect, the universe itself can be called a myth:

"So the myths represent the gods in respect of that which is speakable and that which is unspeakable (*arrheton*), of that which is obscure and that which is manifest, of that which is clear and that which is hidden, and represent the goodness of the gods; just as the gods have given to all alike the benefits to be drawn from objects perceptible to the senses while restricting to the wise the enjoyment of those received from objects perceptible to the intellect, so the myths proclaim to all that the gods exist, telling who they are and of what sort to those able to know it. Again, myths represent the active operations of the gods (*kai tas energeias de mimountai ton theon*). The universe itself can be called a myth (*exesti gar kai ton kosmon muthon eipein*), since bodies and material objects are apparent in it, while souls and intellects are concealed" (*De diis* III.1-15 Nock).

This attitude is analogous to the archaic attitude of the Egyptian theological discourse which, at the level of aesthetic imagination, sometimes abolishes any clear distinction between body (though bodies themselves are of different kinds) and luminous spirit, between corporeality and spirituality. In Egypt, knowledge and language are understood in bodily terms and are symbolized by the semiotic set of concrete corporeal icons. This is because "the body invites to adoration by its very theomorphic form; and that is why it can be the vehicle of a celestial presence and in principle is salvific", according to F. Schuon.[22] However, as Iamblichus pointed out, the Egyptians acknowledge 1) a noetic, or spiritual, 2) a psychic, and 3) a natural, or material, realm:

"They distinguish both the life of soul (*psuche*) and that of the intellect (*nous*) from the life of nature, and not just in the cosmic sphere, but as regards us (i.e., human beings) as well" (*De Myster.* VIII.4.266.9-267.1).

In fact, "the body and the soul are two masks superimposed on the spirit".[23] The Egyptians did not regard the doctrine of the ruling Intellect as merely theoretical, but tried to ascend to this noetic realm by means of hieratic theurgy. Since the "name" of God, as the transcendent and immanent unity of all *medu neter*, extends through all manifested reality, a "myth" may be likened to a mysterious token (*sunthema*), both veiled and unveiled. The operative sacred dimension of myth is lost when its contents are translated into the medium of abstract propositions and arguments.

The hieratic myths may function in the same way as rituals for those "who have power to grasp from the symbols of myth with ease, in a secret way, the truth concerning the gods" (Proclus *In Remp.*83.9-10). This is so because there is a mysterious relationship between the symbols of mythic narrative and that divine world these symbols are able to evoke.[24] A myth itself may be monstrous and bizarre regarding its external account, however, the seeming unlikeness of the symbol to that at which it secretly hints, is essential to its symbolic function, because "symbols are not representations of those things of which they are symbols" (*In Remp.*198.15).

To teach using inspired mythical accounts means to encounter both 1) the iconic *mimesis* (if *eikon* is regarded as a visible likeness of the invisible structure of the cosmos) and 2) the symbolic mode of representation which is not concerned with a one-to-one likeness between copy and model. As Proclus says in defence of the "bodily" and "symbolic" nature of myth:

"The art, therefore, governing sacred matters (*he ton hieron techne*) distributes, in a fitting way, the whole of ritual among the gods and the attendants of the gods (i.e., the daimons), in order that none of those who attend the gods eternally should be left without a share in the religious service due them. This art calls on the gods with the holiest rites and mystic symbols (*tais hagiotatais teletais kai tois mustikois sumbolois*), and invokes the gifts of the daimons through the medium of a secret sympathy by means of visible passions. In the same way, the fathers of such myths as we have been discussing, having gazed on virtually the entire procession of divine reality, and being eager to connect the myths with the whole chain which proceeds from each god, made the surface images of their myths analogous to the lowest races of being which preside over lowest, material sufferings. However, what was hidden and unknown to the many they handed down to those whose passion it is to look upon being, in a form which revealed the transcendent being of the gods concealed in inaccessible places. As a consequence, although every myth is daimonic on its surface, it is divine with respect to its secret doctrine" (*daimonios men estin kata to phainomenon, theios de kata ten aporrheton theorian: In* Remp.78.18-79.4).

8. All Things and All Hieroglyphs

Arguing that modern science is ignorant of a non-quantitative aspect of things, that is, "forms", because it sees no criterion in the beauty of things (though the beauty of a thing is the sign of its internal unity), T. Burckhardt says:

"Traditional cosmology always comprises an aspect of 'art', in the primordial sense of this word: when science goes beyond the horizon of the corporeal world or when the traditional cosmologist gives his attention only to the manifestations, within this very world, of transcendent qualities, it becomes impossible to 'record' the object of knowledge as one records the contours and details of a sensory phenomenon. We are not saying that the intellection of realities higher than the corporeal world is imperfect; we are referring only to its mental and verbal 'fixation'".[25]

According to the Memphite theology, the manifested reality consists of "all things and all hieroglyphs". Ptah, the divine craftsman, who "created all things and caused the gods to originate", endows things with their immutable patterns, depicted by written symbols. Thouth, the scribe of the gods and the "tongue" of Atum, transforms the thoughts of the divine "heart" into spoken and written language. The noetic Ideas or the seeds of Atum are articulated and translated through his hands. So, by the hands of Atum and from his own seed, Shu and Tefnut are brought into being. The "seed" and "hands" may be interpreted as "teeth" and "lips" of Ptah, thus providing the frame for the tongue of Thouth that creates the manifested orders by naming them. The text of the Memphite theology says as follows:

"His Ennead stood before him
As teeth, that is the seed of Atum,
And as lips, that is the hands of Atum.
Verily, the Ennead of Atum originated
Through his seed and through his fingers".[26]

The creation of the first Dyad in order to form the first Triad is depicted as the paradoxical act of masturbation at the summit of the noetic mound of the supreme divine Heliopolis, the solar lotus that emerges from the ineffable darkness of Nun. Thus creation is a luminous hieratic act of articulation – eidetically, iconically, symbolically, and phonetically.[27] The written symbol, as an intelligible *eidos* made visible, originates at the same time as the gods (*neteru*), the archetypal things and the names. The hieroglyphs, regarded as the divine speech (*medu neter*, or *logos* which, at the same time, is *muthos*), represent the external side of the eternal archetypes, or the Platonic Ideas, and in certain sense – *neteru* themselves:

"But all divine speech (hieroglyphs) originated
From that which was thought up by the heart and commanded by the tongue.
And thus were all *kau* created and the *hemuset* determined."[28]

The world is a hierarchy of *medu neter*, i.e., of lights, names, and icons charged with the demiurgic power of *heka* and organized in accord with divine truth (*maat*). When Proclus argues that "names refer primarily to the intelligible Ideas, and that sense-objects get their names, together with their being, from that source" (*In Parm.* IV.852), the Egyptians would add that in some fundamental respect names are tantamount to their immaterial Forms, or the spiritual lights. The gods themselves function as the Forms that bring forth one's name (*ren*), life (*ankh*), spiritual light, that is, intelligence (*akh*), soul (*ba*), vital energy (*ka*), and power (*sekhem*). There are many grades of names, as of knowledge. Proclus says:

"Since Forms exist primarily, as we learn from the *Timaeus* (31a), at the inferior limit among the intelligibles, clearly each of the primary forms is 'one', 'being', and a 'whole', and as such can be identically present to many different things at the same time, but transcendently; so that a Form is both everywhere and nowhere, and being present to all its instances in a non-temporal fashion is unmixed with them" (*In Parm.* IV.861).

The visible sacred icons immanently stand for the ineffable principles and the noetic lights which (as the divine presence of archetypes) are everywhere within the manifested horizon (*akhet*). They also can descend and penetrate into sacred images (*sekhemu*), be they statues, paintings, reliefs, books, tombs, temples, palaces, landscapes or human bodies. Therefore Proclus says:

"Of the intellectual Forms themselves we see images, both in ourselves and in sense-objects; the essence of the intelligible, however, completely transcends, by reason of its unitary nature, both ourselves and everything else, being unknowable in itself. Gods and Intellects it fills with itself; we must be content with participating in intellectual Forms through our souls. Plato demonstrates this truth when he presents our life as double, having both a political and a theoretical aspect (*Polit.*272b), and happiness similarly as double, and traces the one life back to the patronymic supervisions of Zeus, and the other to the order of Kronos and pure Intellect. From this it is plain that he refers back our life in its entirety to the realm of the intellectual Kings, for one of these defines the beginning, and the other the end, of this order of being. Such entities as are beyond these he declares to be objects of contemplation for souls that are divinely possessed and are being initiated into a mystical vision of these things" (*In Parm.* IV.931).

Through the intelligible power of Thouth, language and sacred script translate the primordial archetypes into theurgic symbols and icons. Therefore *medu neter* play a crucial role in the political and cultic articulation of reality. They are essential tools of priestly hermeneutics, of the anagogic interpretation which reveals the truth (*maat*) and opens the way of ascent. The language itself becomes a sort of commentary. It implies a reading of the "mystical letters" of the book-like universe, using a kind of "sacramental interpretation" in which "divine meaning becomes manifest in cultic act", according to J. Assmann.[29] This both semiotic and liturgical procedure establishes homology between the different levels of reality: between heavenly and earthly events, between archetypes and images. Such a type of commentary is aimed at keeping eternal truth and order through the salvific knowledge of names and through contemplation of Ideas, that is, the canonized iconographies of *neteru*, their perennial attributes and manifested aspects of being.

The cosmos is not explained in the "naturalistic" fashion, but rather interpreted in terms of divine acts. It is equated with the dynamic animal-like text which breathes, lives and contains the miraculous powers (*hekau*) of the noetic Forms which are irradiated from the archetypal fullness of Atum-Ra. Esoteric knowledge of names, divine masks, and one's true identity is crucial for the alchemical transformation of the soul and understanding of reality as it is. It includes both knowledge of paradigms embodied in mythical precedents of the "first time" (*tep sepi*) and knowledge of the "ontological" rites, because interpretation of reality itself is staged as a ritual. Therefore *gnosis* and *praxis* are inseparable and a necessary means for the continuance of all divine transformations. He who knows one or another particular *neter* and acts according to its eidetic patterns and energies (as if wearing a mask of this god), becomes a living (*ankh*) image (*tut*) of this particular *neter*, i.e., reveals the primordial noetic identity of an image and its archetype. As F. Schuon pointed out:

"It is in the nature of man – since he combines the outward with the inward – to make use of sensory supports towards the progress of his spirit or the equilibrium of his soul. These supports are either artistic, and so symbolistic and aesthetic, or theurgic; in the latter case their function is to act as the vehicle of benefic, protective, and sanctifying forces; the two types can moreover be combined. ...we say theurgy, and not magic, given that the forces that act in this case have their *raison d'etre* and their essential source in Divine Grace and not in human art".[30]

The meaning of Forms and symbols, deciphered by the priest is salvific in many different senses. The hieratic exegesis of names and attributes has no interest in so-called scientific cause and effect, nor in the reductionist and profane logic that explains the cosmogonical process, but rather has interest in its spiritual glory and elevating power which works through the dramatic myths, liturgies, and symbols imbued with theurgic and metaphysical meaning.

9. Ancient Theories of Ideas

Egyptian hieroglyphs are the Forms of the things that constitute all manifested reality, in fact, manifestation itself. Therefore at the microcosmic level hieroglyphic script is regarded as an imitation of divine demiurgy. The relation between thing and written sign is similar to that between thing and concept in Hellenic philosophy:

"When Ptah conceives of the Ideas of things, he at the same time invents the script that Thoth has only to record, in the same way that, taking the form of the tongue, Thoth utters the thoughts of the heart. Thus an onomasticon, a list of words arranged not alphabetically but in order reflecting the structure of reality, is described as a catalogue of 'all things that exist: what Ptah created, what Thoth copied down'. Thoth, the god of script, only has to find, not invent, what is inherent in the structure of things".[31]

The rise of the so-called "theory of Ideas" in one form or another is an inevitable and logical consequence, resulting from dealing with metaphysical problems of One and Many, of unity and diversity, of Heaven and Earth. It is formulated through searching for the mediating forces and analogies between metaphysical monism and sensible pluralism, that is, a world of infinitely reproduced images.

In Mesopotamia, the spiritual world, mythologized and empirically visualized as an iconic sky-realm of stars, is both separated from the sensible earthly realm and closely connected with it both in general schemes of macrocosmic-microcosmic analogies and in particular symbolic networks. The schemes of Heaven-Earth correspondences indicate an archetypal set of causative and analogical relations. The tablet of the Kassite age (c.1730 B.C.) declares:

"The vase *agubbu* is Ninhaburkuddu, queen of incantations… The tamarisk is Anu. The palmtree-head is Tammuz. The plant *mashtakal* is Ea, the reed *salalu* is Ninurta… Silver is the Great Good (moon). Gold is Enmesharra (sun). Copper is Ea. Lead is Ninmah (here a great mother-goddess)… The cypress is Adad. Variegated wool is Lamashtu, daughter of Anu. The aromatic Zu is Ninurta. The censer is the god Urash. The torch is the god Gibil. The pure incense is the god Negun (son of Ninlil, consort of Enlil)… The barley grains, the dining table, the pots *gagz* are Ninurta-Ea (here gods of potters). The weapon with seven laurel-wood heads is the storm, the weapon is Marduk…"[32]

As is clearly indicated in the same text, it is addressed only to the initiated: thus, the doctrine of correspondences, symbols, analogies, and paradigmatic relations is regarded as an esoteric teaching. According to the commentary provided by J. Lindsay, for the ancient Mesopotamians, everything on earth has its divine exemplar. The archetypal divine aspect and the earthly aspect of things are both fused together and separated. He says:

"Under the extreme intellectualizing pressure at work in Greek philosophic circles, the divine was cut away and became the transcendent Ideas of Plato".[33]

The different concepts of elements mediate between monistic and pluralistic trends of ancient thought, interposing a few basic "paradigmatic" substances between the One and the Many, for instance, four elements, or categories, which elaborated the Mesopotamian and Egyptian image of the four-square universe and that of the pillars (personified by Shu) of the sky. This is the central metaphysical theme of the III-II millennium mythologies and ritual practices, accepting that the Word (Hu, *medu neter*), or creative Magic (Heka), should mediate between 1) a primal state of invisible mixture of all gods and things and 2) a manifested plurality of corporeal entities, things, and beings.

Following certain Egyptian and Babylonian esoteric traditions (e.g., that of the Heliopolitan priests who emphasized the role of the Ennead in the process of creation), Pythagoras interposed numbers between the One and Many, establishing the triunity of the One-Few-Many. According to T. McEvilley, Empedocles would transpose this triunity "into his theory of elements and Plato would expand it into his theory of Ideas".[34] T. McEvilley also maintains that this doctrine is expressed in many different ways (including the popular theory of the Cosmic Person) and indicates the transition from mythology to philosophy.[35] So Pythagoras tried to investigate the underlying unity of the cosmos and its knowability, a possibility of scientific knowledge, called *episteme* by Plato, though the Pythagorean wisdom is in part cultic and aimed at practical realization of one's hidden divinity. T. McEvilley says:

"On the one hand, the idea of seeking a manageable number of ultimate roots of things expressed a metaphysical desire to appropriate the world into a knowable domain by capturing it in a net of structural projections. On the other… the materialism with which the concept of the elements was imbued linked it to naturalistic modes of thought and invited empirical investigations. The idea of a limited or family-sized number of roots of things is a partly demythologized version of the Bronze Age cosmology of a few familiarly related gods and goddesses who rule and in a sense constitute universe."[36]

10. Proclus' Conception of Divine Forms and Unities

In late antiquity, an Idea is regarded as an incorporeal thing which is the cause of those things which are similar to it and is the model for the existence of sensible things. Since there is a hierarchy of intellects from the divine intellects (*theios noes*) to the cosmic intellect (*nous tou kosmou*), participated by the World-Soul, and to ordinary thinking intellects (*noeroi noes*), Ideas, as real and objective entities, cannot be regarded simply as thoughts of individual human minds. Instead, they are *noemata* of the divine Intellect, or Being. Therefore they subsist by their own noetic existence in the realm of Being. Although their effects are found in the sensible world of bodies, by themselves they are immaterial (*asomatos*), simple (*haplous*), eternal (*aidios*), unchangeable (*ametabletos*), and transcendent (*exeremenos*).

According to the Neoplatonic perspective, the so-called "universals" that Aristotle sets against Plato's Ideas either refer to the "immanent universal" or to the secondary abstraction made by the human mind after it has experienced those immanent forms already placed in sensibles by the Demiurge in the process of *proodos*. However, the pre-existent forms (*eide*) of all characteristics that actually exist in the sensible world are *a priori* contained (as the noetic "sparks" and "traces") in human minds and, if they are hidden, they must be recollected through spiritual exercises, *askesis* and dialectic. Proclus says:

"In sum, then, the Idea in the truest sense is an incorporeal cause, transcending its participants, a motionless Being, exclusively and really a model, intelligible to souls through images, and intelligizing causally the existents modelled upon it. So that from all these problems we have ferreted out the single definition of an Idea in the true sense.

"If, then, any wish to attack the concept of Ideas, let them attack this definition, and not assume them to be either corporeal images (*phantasiai*) of their own minds, or coordinate with the things of this realm, or devoid of being, or correspondent with our conceptions, or let them produce some other sophistic definitions such as these, and then fabricate their arguments on that basis; but let them bear in mind that Parmenides declared the Ideas to be gods, and that they subsist in God, as the Oracle also declares (fr.37 DP):

"'The Intellect of the Father whirred, conceiving with his unwearying will Ideas of every form'.

"For the 'fount of the Ideas' is God, and the God in whom it is contained is the Demiurgic Intellect; and if it is the primal Idea, then it is to this that the above definition, assembled from the problems posed by Parmenides, pertains" (*In Parm.* IV.934-935).

Proclus speaks of a complete intermixture of the Ideas which, as a single whole, constitutes a harmony (*sumpnoia*) in the unparticipated divine Intellect, according to the metaphysical principle that "everything is in everything but in a manner appropriate to each" (*panta en pasin, all' oikeios en hekastoi*). This principle, originally attributed to Anaxagoras' theory of mixture, by extension may be applied to all manifested reality, functioning as the main method for hermeneutical exegesis and analysis. It faithfully reflects the world of Egyptian gods, symbolically summarized by the great Ennead. All *neteru* are regarded as manifestations (*bau*), faces, or hypostases, of one another, thus constituting countless iconographical combinations, but ultimately deriving from the single Principle, the single God, who reveals himself in millions of forms. However, in such an intelligible compound as Amun-Ra, Ra is not viewed as being lost in Amun, but remains himself just as much as Amun does and both of them can again be manifested separately or appear in other metaphysical combinations.[37]

Although the power of each *eidos* and each *neter* extends everywhere, in themselves they are nowhere. Not all things participate in them alike. L. Rosan explains the reason why the eternal world is only imperfectly reflected within time: the departure of characteristics from Ideas is perfect, but the return of things to Ideas is imperfect. This is what "distinguishes one thing from another, namely, the degree to which it returns to its causes".[38]

Proclus speaks of descending chains that appear as Forms proceed through successive downward steps, arguing that the series start from "Man Himself", then, comes to a "heavenly man", then a "fiery man", an "airy man", a "watery man", and last of all – an "earthly man". The whole series depends upon the intelligible henad called "Man Himself" (*In Parm.* III.812). Proclus says:

"Thus from the paradigm of the soul of Helios the divine soul of the sun first proceeds and, after it, all the angelic souls in this train, then the souls of daimons associated with the sun, and lastly the particular souls in this procession. All of them are generated on the model of a single Idea, and so exist as orderly arrays of parts to wholes and of followers to leaders, while the one intelligent cause furnishes unity and continuity to their procession. Similarly, the paradigm of the soul of Selene first generates the divine soul belonging to the moon, then the angelic, the daimonic, and the participated souls; and the intellectual monad contains the whole number of them" (*In Parm.* III.818).

The action of Ideas upon things or rather their participation in intellectual Ideas may be likened

1) to reflections in a mirror, when receptive matter, holding itself before the Demiurge and the artifice of his Nous, is filled with Ideas from him;

2) to imprints made by a seal upon wax (for the seal, *emphasis*, meaning the Idea which leaves a trace of itself), but this impression is not the same as the seal that made it, just as the enmattered species is not identical with the divine and immaterial Idea;

3) to the images (*eikones*) made by the art of painting or sculpture, because "it is by divine craftsmanship that things here are shaped into a likeness of the divine Ideas, and this is why the whole sensible cosmos is called a likeness (*eikon*) of the intelligible" (*In Parm.* IV.840; cf. *Tim.*92c).

Proclus regards this analogy based on the principle of similarity (*homoiosis*) as superior to the former kinds.

Since everything in the huge meta-structure of the universe is in some way (either as a cause, by existence, or as an image) mirrored in everything else, unity is present even to a material thing, but in a fashion proper to it, being not of the same rank as an intelligible unity itself. The universal set of unity, interweaving every portion of manifested reality with every other portion, is constituted of henads (*henades*). The unparticipated independent henads, standing closer to the One in the hierarchy of causation, are themselves called *theoi*, while participated henads are *sumbola* and *sunthemata* – the supernatural theurgic symbols and tokens able to elevate the soul to the level of transcendent union (*henosis*).

If any description of manifested reality, understood as theophany, involves a description of henads, i.e., of the transcendent gods and their ineffable symbols extended through all levels of being, then rational philosophical and mythological descriptions coincide. For example, the theology of the *Chaldean Oracles* already identified the Chaldean entities iynges (*iunges*, maintained as the "thoughts of the Father") with Platonic Ideas. The iynges, that is the living mythical beings playing the role of the Forms, are regarded as purveyors of unity. They produce a multitude of offspring and then swallow them up and integrate them into true noetic synthesis.

The intelligible iynges drive the soul upwards and, along with the so-called "maintainers" (likened to the elevating rays of the visible sun) and teletarchs (who are initiators and guides at all stages of the soul's striving towards noetic union), they personify divine grace at all levels of being. The theurgic instrument used by the Chaldean Platonists and also called iynx (*iunx*, pl. *iunges*) consists of a cone which begins in unity and becomes plurality through a vertiginous multiplication of itself.[39]

The hierarchy of unities is the hierarchy of the traditional gods, their names and attributes. Therefore the divine characters penetrate even to the last terms of the participant series: the henad communicates even to the body an echo of its own quality. In this way the body (*soma*) becomes not only ensouled and intellective (*empsuchon kai noeron*), but also divine (*theion*). According to Proclus:

"All divine bodies (*soma theion*) are such through the mediation of a divinized soul, all divine souls through a divine intelligence, and all divine intelligences by participation in a divine henad: the henad is immediate deity (*autothen theos*), the intelligence most divine (*nous theiotaton*), the soul divine (*psuche theia*), the body deiform." (*soma theoeides: ET* 129).

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BEING IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND NEOPLATONIC THOUGHT

1. From Eidology to the Metaphysics of Being and Beyond Being

The entire scope of Neoplatonic ontology cannot be explained by a simple division between Being and Becoming. Instead it requires us to face a number of noetic principles, arranged "inside" or "outside" the ineffable One, and to deal with their manifestations or prolongations at different levels of reality. In this particular context, even the term "ontology" may be misleading, since it is too closely bound to modern philosophical concepts and hermeneutical patterns.

As Denis O'Brien pointed out when discussing non-being in Parmenides, Plato and Plotinus:

"There is almost nothing in the history of Greek philosophy which can be taken as a matter of course".[1]

This observation is to a much greater extent true when we turn to ancient Egyptian thought, because one cannot simply dismiss the prevailing views of the ancient Hellenic philosophers attesting the Egyptian roots of their philosophy.[2] The language of myths, sacred rites and theurgic symbols operates at a different level to that of rational philosophical discourse. However, the hermeneutical attitude of Damascius, in his attempt to read Neoplatonic metaphysics into ancient Egyptian cosmogonical accounts (*De principiis* I.316.20-I.324.15), is not to be regarded as altogether groundless. It makes perfect sense because, in some respects at least, it represents the initial stock from which much of the later metaphysical themes and categories are derived directly or indirectly.

We will now try to outline the Neoplatonic and ancient Egyptian theory of being in general and to show that there are some undeniable parallels and analogies which, putting aside the morbid question of historical influences, deserve careful attention. Let us turn, at first, to Neoplatonic ontology.

Most Western scholars are quite comfortable with the dogmatic assertion that by establishing the First Principle which is both beyond Being and Intellect, Plotinus turned so-called Middle Platonism into something rather like "Neoplatonism". To those who are obsessed by one-sided positivist classifications and try to force their own ideological premises into the form of a sort of orthodox history of philosophy, this Neoplatonism (especially in its Post-Iamblichean developments) seems to be no more than a regrettable deviation from sound "classical" rationalism and an inexcusable fall into the sin of ritualism and superstition.

Now it becomes clear that late Hellenic Neoplatonism is far from so-called irrationalism, as it is understood by arrogant modern scholars. Even theurgy, instead of being regarded as a corruption of rational philosophy, is to be understood as the culmination of philosophy and a return to its divine origins.

According to L. M. de Rijk, rethinking the notion of transcendence and immanence within the Platonic tradition involved the gradual transition from a metaphysics of Forms to a metaphysics of Being (or ontology in the strict sense) and then to a metaphysics of the One (or henology). He argues that such developments were initiated by Plato himself, though the final step of putting one Principle beyond Being was taken by Plotinus.[3] However, leaving aside the question of whether Plato's theory of Forms actually presupposes the entire transcendent domain of perfect Being and perfect Good, which is *epekeina tes ousias*, we can raise the following question:

Is this gradual transition from a metaphysics of Forms to the Neoplatonic One only a change of emphasis within the inner semantic body of Platonism, or does it mark a sudden discovery made by Plotinus - a universal discovery with enormous consequences, namely, that the ultimate Principle is beyond both Being and Intellect?

If one is not an irremediable modern nominalist of the worst kind, there is sufficient reason to think that the ineffable Principle, the One beyond Being, is not an "invention", made by Plotinus or by certain anonymous Neopythagoreans, initiates of the oral esoteric tradition, be it a real chain of transmission or a regrettable fiction, as most modern scholars prefer to believe. The Egyptian Father of the gods, symbolized by the primordial Waters, is an exact mythological equivalent of the Neoplatonic One. The same could be said regarding the transcendent and invisible aspect of the Theban Amun. At the very least, if one were brave enough to accept the metaphysical premises of *philosophia perennis* of any type, one would be able to find similar doctrines almost anywhere from Pharaonic Egypt to Vedic India.

It is fairly evident that every ancient metaphysical system was directed at unchanging and eternal principles, or ineffable sources, and approached ontology by establishing what is fundamental and primary in reality and on which all things depend.

2. Hierarchy of Priority and Posteriority

As Werner Beierwaltes pointed out, the Neoplatonists make a clear distinction between Being and the being of an entity, which is always a particular something. Despite various formulations and divergent attitudes, this means that the One itself as the supra-essential (not existing in particularity) is different from Being in the first and true sense, i.e., Intellect.[4]

Being proper is related to the second hypostasis of Plotinus and is the intelligible summit of *kosmos noetos* which emerges from the ineffable One, understood as the *dunamis panton*. Though, according to Dominic J. O'Meara, the expressions "hierarchy" and "chain of being" are too vague and too open to anachronism to be useful in approaching the philosophy of Plotinus,[5] it is not necessary to substitute for them the priority terminology formulated by Plato and Aristotle and used by Plotinus in articulating the structure of reality, because the meaning remains the same.

Priority may be understood as a logical priority, or priority by nature, and being which involves a hierarchy of perfection, knowledge, value, purity and simplicity. What is prior is more simple, more closely resembles the supreme unity which is the most simple Principle. The posterior is contained in the prior and the prior is contained in the posterior, being its constitutive presence (since every level of creation is a result of contemplation) and, at the same time, transcending it. Therefore the prior is not only in the posterior, but also independent of it (*Enn.* III.8.9.1-10). Thus the hierarchy includes different levels of transcendence and immanence and their coordinated relations according to the metaphysical pattern of abiding, proceeding and returning.

Within the hierarchy of manifested reality, the distinction is made between noetic Being (being-infinitive, *to einai*) and determinate being (being – participle, *to on*). This distinction, found in the anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides*, attributed to Porphyry by Pierre Hadot, is a source of the scholastic distinction between essence and existence, ascribed to the Persian Peripatetic Ibn Sina. The late Neoplatonic distinction between *huparxis* and *ousia,* that is between 1) pre-existence, pure noetic Being in its simplicity, and 2) substance as the determinative subject taken with its accidents, made by Proclus and Damascius, follows the same pattern of thought.[6]

Since all determined being must be limited by its proper form, the first Principle of all determination (*peras*) in the realm of being, the One, is beyond any description. Everything has some form of being, from the noetic *pleroma* to the minimal existence or nonbeing of matter which possesses no attributive being of any formal kind. As Kevin Corrigan rightly observes, by comparison with the intelligible world, "the being"of matter, and of bodies founded upon it, is "the being of things which do not exist" (*Enn.* III.6.6.31-32).[7]

3. Indivisible and Divisible Being

Neoplatonic ontological terms can cause much confusion. As a rule, Plotinus uses the infinitive of the verb "to be" with the neuter article, *to einai*, to denote "the being" which can be attributed to anything.[8] But the neuter participial from the verb "to be", *to on*, and the plural, *ta onta* (an equivalent of *ta pragmata*, the Procline term for the things or noetic realities) refers to:

1) the noetic Being as such and all those real beings, intellects, or lights, which constitute *Nous* and are the contents of *kosmos noetos*;

2) being, as a category among the all-pervading greatest kinds (*megista gene*), adapted from Plato's *Sophist.*

The greatest kinds are as follows: Being, Rest, Motion, Identity, Difference. These "Platonic" categories, however, may be easily deduced from different ancient cosmogonies, including the Orphic myths and their Egyptian prototypes. For Plotinus, they mean different faces of the eternal life of *Nous*. As regards the arrangement of the entire noetic cosmos into the order of Being, Life, Intelligence, Being represents the stage *mone* abiding, Life – *proodos* (proceeding), and Intelligence – *epistrophe* (reversion) within the boundaries of the second hypostasis.

The term *ousia*, usually translated as substance, essence, or entity, may be equated to the expression *ho esti* – "what it is". It indicates both the simple noetic substances and composite physical substances of separate individuals. Aristotle calls both form and matter, as well as their composite, by the same term, *ousia*, and recognises the noetic *ousia* also. According to Plotinus, all these *ousiai* are not equally substances (*Enn.* VI.1.2.8-12). He insists that the term *ousia* is not employed in the same sense in all these cases. Therefore different substances must belong to different genera. Dexipus formulates this ontological problem as follows: if there are two *ousiai*, one noetic, the other sensible, how can they be related to a single genus? (*In Categ.*40.14f). Trying to solve this problem, Dexipus asserts:

"Plotinus in fact posits *ousia* as a genus unique among noetic realities because it procures being for incorporeal forms universally and gives being to all the forms which are sensible and blended with matter. If that is so, the principle of *ousia* extends across all things, taking successively the first, second, and third rank insofar as it gives being to one primarily and to others in another manner. This is why, if everything leads to this principle of *ousia* (since everything is suspended from it) Aristotle's description of *ousia* can also provide a glimpse of the first principle of *ousia*, from which the ousia has fallen to its lowest degree" (*In Categ.*40.28-41.3).

Accordingly, the single principle must be understood as noetic *ousia*. In Plotinus' own words:

"Noetic *ousia* in this case would be *ousia* in a primary sense, the other in a derivative and lesser sense" (*Enn.* VI.1.3.3-5).

As Pierre Hadot pointed out, Plotinus admitted that the noetic *ousia* is a principle, because it is *ousia* in itself; it grounds being, because it is the supreme idea of *ousia*, a genus in the Platonic sense, that is, an intelligible reality which exists in and for itself.[9] Such is the primordial essence or substance of all lower manifestations. Therefore Plotinus equates indivisible *ousia* with noetic reality as such, which may be imagined as the fixed centre of a circle whence the rays of the derived being proceed. Hence, the divisible *ousia* is related to sensible forms, or the moving periphery of a circle. The intermediate *ousia*, which the Demiurge made by blending the indivisible *ousia* and the *ousia* which becomes divisible in the body, is the *ousia* of the soul (*Enn.* IV.2.1.29ff). It resembles the descending and ascending ray, or the isthmus between noetic being and material non-existence.

In the primary and fundamental sense, Being is not sensible, but noetic or rather divine reality in which sensible instances participate and from which they derive their existence. The hierarchy of *ousiai* resembles the hierarchies depicted in the ancient cosmogonies and creation myths, based on the chain of priority and posteriority and on sacred genealogies regarded as family stories. To turn the actors of the cosmogonical ritual, be they gods, daimons, or miraculous forces, into mental categories means to separate the living flesh from the dead bones and present the purified bones as the logical structure of being. This translation is a painful hermeneutical procedure which, at the dawn of Hellenic philosophy, or rather of rational and emancipated philosophical discourse, was a purely esoteric undertaking supported by dreams of power.

According to Plotinus, the principle of *ousia* extends through all things and constitutes the degrees of being in the continuous process of irradiation and creative contemplation, which means the chain of participation and inevitable degradation from the noetic to the sensible realm. All degrees (*taxeis*) of manifested reality have their origin and end in the noetic principle of *ousia*.

The whole metastructure may also be understood in terms of archetypes and their images. The outer *energeia* is an *eidolon* of the inner activity – therefore the relationship of an archetype and its image is connected with the notion of *energeia*. Even soul must serve as matter in relation to *Nous* which enforms and enlightens it, and a human being of this lower corporeal world is the *energeia tes psuches*, not the *ousia* in its real noetic sense, because the sensible *anthropos* (in contrast to archetypal man, placed in the noetic cosmos) is an image of higher noetic *ousia* and *energeia*.[10] The spiritual ascent to first principles is also described in ontological terms.

4. The One as Foundation of Being

Huparxis is another important ontological term which causes a permanent headache to those who try to render it into modern languages. Iamblichus distinguished between an entity's *ousia* and its *huparxis*.

Damascius explained *huparxis* as a composite word made from *hupo* and *archein*. Accordingly, *huparxis* signifies the first principle of every hupostasis - being the primal ontological foundation for the structure of manifested reality as a whole and for each part. In the sense of the simplicity anterior to all things, *huparxis* may be equated to the One itself which is the cause of every *ousia* but is not itself *ousia*.[11]

Therefore *huparxis* is pre-existence or the pure and unconditioned noetic foundation of Being, rendered by Francesco Romano as *natura profonda, natura essenziale,* instead of *esistenza* (existence).[12] However, the ineffable One in itself must transcend *huparxis* understood as meaning singular natures rather than abstract ones, though (in sharp contrast to modern opinion) first principles and noetic realities are more concrete than their lower manifestations.[13]

The One, or the Good, as the Foremost Principle (*protiste arche*) is the cause of theophany down to the lowest level of *huparxis*. Thus the primordial and all subsequent procession is the transmission (*metadosis*) of Oneness by means of radiation from above (*katalampsis*). According to Proclus:

"All that subsists in any fashion has its being either in its cause, as an originative potency (*kat' aitian estin archoeidos*); or as a substantial predicate (*kath' huparxin*); or by participation, after the manner of an image" (*kata methexin eikonikos: ET* 65 Dodds).

In many cases, the term *ousia* is used by Proclus as equivalent to *huparxis*, because *huparxis* differs from *ousia* only on the level of the One. Being is the universal attribute of all that is and, on its own level, Being is the cause of all that is.[14] The super-abundance of divine power which appears as an immanent irradiation (*ellampsis*) is active through all levels of existence. It keeps the unity (*henosis*) of being through the noetic and sensible cosmos as the constitutive agent of everything's *huparxis*.

When located above the level of Being, this principle of all theophanies and ontological processions is regarded as *apeiria*, the Unlimited and transcendent Infinity, in certain respects equivalent to the Egyptian god Shu before his entering into Being, whereas the power below that level is called *zoe*, noetic Life, or Shu manifested as the noetic Space and Light. Since the One, or the Good, is *dunamis panton* in the highest and ineffable sense, its causation gives rise to all subsequent *hupostaseis* which are *dynameis* of any particular level of being along with their participants.

The noetic *ousia* is inferior to Oneness; therefore the One presumably has *huparxis*, but is *huperousion*, beyond Being. What appears below the One is a mixture of *peras* and *apeiria*, and the first level of mixtures constitutes the domain of real beings (*ta onta*).

Iamblichus situated *hen on*, the One Being of Plato's *Parmenides*, at the summit of the noetic realm. This Monad of Being, or the *ontos ousia*, directly participates in the One itself. In this sense the One Being is identical with the *noeton*. However, the problem is as follows: What kind of being, if any, does the First Principle have? Though the One Being, which is called the Unified, *to henomenon*, by Damascius, is closer to the One than to Being, nevertheless it constitutes the first and the highest level of Being. One can wonder whether this search for logical and semantic precision is simply a hermeneutical attempt to establish the scope of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, or is it based on the profound anxiety of the human mind when facing its own fatal limits and its inability to solve the metaphysical puzzle on the level of discursive thought?

Damascius understands this very well in his radical question which runs as follows:

"Either procession is from that which exists, in which case, how could what already exists previously [be able to] proceed? Or else procession comes from something that doesn't exist, yet what kind of being could come from something that doesn't exist? Something actual cannot come from something potential, since the former is superior to the latter, while the effect is always inferior to the cause (*De princip.* I.226.11-16).

When rational philosophical discourse faces the threshold of the Ineffable, which surpasses any attempt of reason to draw a consistent "mechanical" picture of first principles and their relations, sheer paradoxes are unavoidable. The rationalistic approach insists that one point (or instance, entity, category) must necessarily touch another point; otherwise the imagined gap seems to be unsurpassable. One "hand" must touch another "hand" in order to pass some "parcel of reality" or the impulse of power, as in the well known children's game. The mythical cosmogonies do exactly the same, but instead of abstract terms and categories they have divine names or attractive *dramatis personae*: fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, lovers, traitors and gangs.

5. Incomprehensible Divine Unities

What place is allotted to the gods in the Neoplatonic cosmogonical scheme which may differ in detail while preserving essentially the same metastructure? Like the Egyptian *neteru*, the gods in Neoplatonic philosophy constitute and occupy different levels of reality, being in certain respects this reality itself. Therefore Proclus clearly asserts:

"Every god is a self-complete henad or unit, and every self-complete henad is a god" (*ET* 114).

"Every god is above Being (*huperousios*), above Life (*huperzoos*), and above Intelligence" (*hupernous: ET* 115).

"Every god is participable, except the One" (*ET* 116)

"Every god is a measure of things existent" (*ET* 117)

"All that is divine has a *huparxis* which is goodness, a power (*dunamis*) which has the character of unity, and a mode of knowledge which is secret and incomprehensible to all secondary beings alike" (*ET* 121).

"The procession of all things existent and all cosmic orders of existence extends as far as do the orders of gods" (*ET* 144).

According to Damascius, Iamblichus was the first among the Platonic philosophers to assert that all gods insofar as gods are beyond being and substance. They are no less than self-subsistent *huparxeis* that transcend the noetic *ousia*.[15] In short, the Iamblichean gods are the participated henads, as Syrianus and Proclus would say.

This attitude is rejected by those contemporary scholars who have argued that the gods Iamblichus related to the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* are not transcendent unities, or henads, in the Procline sense, but rather the noetic gods. This philosophical riddle and other similar problems are not as important as they appear to the pedantic minds of those who struggle with "the notorious difficulties" such as where exactly to position the henads of Iamblichus and Proclus: beyond the noetic realm or among the intelligibles, beyond the categories of *peras* and *apeiria* or at the same level? Truly speaking, they are "nowhere" as well as "everywhere". We can specify even different types of henads, but we cannot say what they are, if they "are" at all, and where they are, except in the imagined metaphysical "icon" which may serve as a means of contemplation and *anagoge* in the same sense as a Tantric or Buddhist *upaya*.

Let us now turn to the assertion of Damascius who says as follows:

"Almost all philosophers before Iamblichus considered that there is only one God beyond being, whereas all other gods are substantial beings (*ousiodeis*), but divinized through illuminations (*ellampseis*) from the One. According to them the multitude of super-substantial henads are not self-subsistent hypostases (*autoteleis hupostaseis)*, but illuminations from the only God and deifications given unto the various substances" (*De princip.* III.64.7-14).

The henads "grow up" from the One through different additions (*prostheseis*) to the One. These "additions", in certain respects parallel to the Divine Names of Islamic Sufi theology, multiply them as both the transcendent and immanent ground-set of the entire manifested reality. This reality possesses all different ontological attributes which ultimately derive their existence from the divine source. However, the negative deductions of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* may be applied to the gods, or henads, considered as pure unities without any discernible character, i.e., incomprehensible to all secondary beings.

Any god as such, be he noetic, noetic-noeric, noeric, hypercosmic or encosmic, insofar as he is *henas* and *theos*, he is not many, not similar, not identical, not different and so on.[16] In other words, all negations of the first hypothesis of *Parmenides* can be applied to the henads as unities that are above Being. But the noetic Being may be many, similar, identical, different and so on, as the second hypothesis of *Parmenides* implies.

However, if the henads originate through additions, they appear to be somewhat closer to the level of Being, or rather the One Being, and thus belong to the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides.* As Proclus himself pointed out, all the henads coexist with being, therefore each god "is", though the One itself is beyond Being (*In Parm.*499.78). For this reason C. Steel raises the legitimate question:

"But do not all divine henads as *autoteleis hupostaseis* subsist beyond being, even if they are distinguished by different characters that can only be described on the level of the second hypothesis"?[17]

Arguing that the gods are *huperousios* like the One itself, Proclus, however, mentions that the gods are participated and this feature establishes the only difference between the One and the henads. The henads as *huperousios* cannot be participated in Being, but they themselves are participated by essence and that which is, i.e., by real beings (*de hupo ousias kai tou ontos*).[18] Therefore the gods are the participated henads able to bind all things to themselves thus "connecting through themselves all that comes after them with the One which transcends all equally" (*Theol. Plat.* III.4.17.19-12).

The mysterious irradiation from the One constitutes the different levels of existence: those which stand close to the super-abandant centre and those which are far removed from it (although the distance is not spatial or temporal, but rather ontological and epistemological, regarded as a veil of ignorance which conceals the real divine identity of things) and resemble reflections, copies, or shadows of their intelligible models. The realm of real beings (*ta onta*) is a mixture of *peras* and *apeiria*, two transcendent metaphysical principles. This domain of real beings is interpreted as the first level of noetic Being, followed by noetic Life and Intellect. The intelligible triad of Being-Life-Intellect determines the inner structure and order within the diacosm of Being.

Every level of the noetic domain has a similar triadic structure which emphasizes one or another element of the triad, and such triads are multiplied in the course of irradiation. The triadic structure of all noetic entities mirrors the primal triad of Limit (*peras*), Unlimited (*apeiron*) and Mixture (*mikton*). The entire manifestation is ordered by descending chain of triads arranged according to the triadic structure of abiding (*mone*), procession (*proodos*) and reversion (*epistrophe*).

Below Intellect proper, equated to the Demiurge of *Timaeus* at the noeric (or thinking intellectual) level, we find the level of Soul. It contains: 1) the Soul which transcends the corporeal cosmos entirely; 2) the World-Soul, and 3) particular souls, i.e., a) the immanent souls of the fixed stars and planets, and b) the souls of "the gods below the Moon" (Procl. *In Tim*.255.10) to which category human souls also belong. .

The next two levels are that of Nature (*phusis*), understood as an immanent but incorporeal seminal power which gives birth to the material world, and that of Body (*soma*), the material world itself which is an appearance, or shadow, deprived of all productive ability of its own.[19]

6. Images of Divine Light

The whole metastructure of being is regarded as an incorporeal as well as corporeal *agalma*, a divine Statue, which is intelligent, alive, and existent. According to Proclus, the henad communicates even to the body an echo of its own quality: in this way the body becomes not only animate and intellective but also divine.

This divine metastructure is governed by the transcendent light that stems from the Good and is a unifying force. Or rather the manifested reality "is" the transcendent light itself, veiled by the multiplicity of forms, beings, images and reflections. To put it in terms of Neoplatonic analogy, just as sensible things are made sun-like by the light of the visible Sun, so the noetic realities are made god-like by the invisible hypernoetic Sun which is *to agathon*. Following the example of Plato, the Neoplatonists used the language of "participation" (*metexis*) and "imitation" (*mimesis*) to describe the dependance of image on its original. As A. H. Armstrong remarked regarding the doctrine of matter, held by Syrianus and Proclus:

"This ultimate invisible and formless mirror is no longer only a dark negativity which has to be there if the self-diffusion of the Good which is its diffraction in images is to reach its furthest possible limit, and is that ultimate limit. In being this, for the Athenians it is the ultimate manifestation of the Dyad or *Apeiron*, the Infinite, one of the two first principles of all reality proceeding from the One or Good, and by all Pythagorean and Platonic tradition the feminine one, coupled with the masculine *Peras*, the principle of limit and form. ... But this Infinite is also the theophany of that in the ineffable First which makes it impossible to think or image it. She presents through all the levels of mirroring the symbol of the escape of God, of that which makes it ultimately impossible to organize the Good. So at the bottom of the cosmos of mirrors as well as at the top the image of mirroring breaks, as all concepts and images break".[20]

For Proclus, to speak about transcendent Light and to speak about the One (*to hen*) is the same. The noetic light shines forth from the One as does the Egyptian Atum-Ra who enters into Being from the ineffable waters of Nun. The One holds together all noetic entities, the intelligible gods and intellects, thus making them one. This is the divine unity in diversity, since light and divinity have the same function. If light stems from the One (who is the Father of all *neteru,* according to the Egyptians), the gods likewise appear with it. The light unifies the noetic entities making them similar to the Good and constituting their real being through participation in light which is the same as participation in divinity of the Unspeakable One. This is the mystery of divine self-disclosure, the traditional symbolical accounts of which were either received as an "illumination from the gods themselves", or inherited by the Neoplatonists from the sacred wisdom of ancient civilizations.

7. The One and Many according to Egyptians

When we turn to the ancient Egyptian conception of reality, we encounter considerable difficulties, because Egyptian mythical images, icons, and symbols cannot be regarded simply as equivalents of Greek ontological terms. The Egyptian universe is composed not of things or abstract categories, but of beings, i.e., of distinct archetypal masks and personalities that may be visualized, contemplated and interpreted in many different ways. They constitute various ontological levels of being.

Since the Egyptian universe consists of living beings, the noetic creation, manifestation and cosmic existence are not to be viewed as the product of impersonal forces, dead elements and abstract categories, but as a rich fabric woven by eternal divine thoughts and actions similar to the hieratic rites. In addition, the Egyptian accounts of creation cannot be reduced to a single dogmatic description, though all different perspectives reveal a metaphysical structure which is remarkably consistent.

James P. Allen is wrong in his assertion that "material causality seems to have been the first as well as the central focus" of the Egyptian cosmogonical accounts.[21] This is a strong prejudice current from the time of Sallustius and dear to those modern Egyptologists who are uncomfortable with metaphysics and symbolism of any kind. But as Iamblichus pointed out, far from considering everything to be of a physical nature the Egyptians did place pure divine intelligence above nature (*katharon te noun huper ton kosmon protitheasi: De myster.*267.4) and made a clear distinction between psychical and noetic life on the one hand and physical nature on the other. This distinction was made on a macrocosmic as well as a microcosmic level. We should agree with E. Iversen who argued that Iamblichus' translation of the concepts of the Shabaka text (which contains the so-called Memphite theology) into philosophical terms is remarkably correct.[22] His statement that the Egyptians did not consider everything to be of a physical nature is confirmed by the number of ancient texts which emphasize the importance of divine Intelligence and assert the First Principle which is beyond Being.

The basic distinction between noetic and sensible existence as well as that between noetic and hypernoetic levels of reality underlies the entire metaphysical doctrine of the Egyptians and presupposes a corresponding distinction between different kinds of gods and between different theophanies. The ineffable first Principle, the supreme Father of the gods, is the Sole and Only One, unborn and self-created. But divine manifestations, to put it into Hellenic terms, may be henadic, noetic, psychic and physical, though the Egyptian theological discourse employed bodily language to describe both corporeal and incorporeal beings.

Egyptian priests, or "servants of God", envisaged reality as a henocentric cosmological structure constituted by multiple and dynamic divine forces and regarded as the cultic body of the Demiurge, the all-embracing solar Intellect. The ineffable *deus invisibilis* is the ultimate fount of divinity, comprising on the noetic level all other gods which are consubstantial with him and viewed as organs and parts of his immaterial body. The intelligible cosmos is prefigured in the depths of the dark primordial Waters (Nun), and the process of noetic manifestation is performed through the Monad differentiated into male and female principles (Shu and Tefnut). Then the second God turns intelligible into sensible creation.

In different cosmogonical accounts, all these principles may be called by different names. For instance, in Memphite theology the second God is described as Atum - the All, i.e., the noetic and archetypal *pleroma,* but not "the sensible cosmos reflecting the body of the creator, in which at the same time he functioned as heart and tongue", as E. Iversen supposes.[23] As the noetic archetype of the hearts and tongues of all living creatures, he himself cannot be sensible in the modern sense of this word.

Both the noetic and sensible universe, and the Osirian realm between them, depend on the transcendent light of the first Principle. Sometimes we are unable to draw a clear demarcation between these levels, because noetic, psychic and sensible creations are equally dependent on the constant influx of the life-giving force, namely, the breath of life (*suh en ankh: swh n 'nh*) which flows from the first Principle and is immanent in all things. This breath, "who gives air to the throat in his name of Amon", is called the *pneuma* of Zeus or Amon by Plutarch (*De Iside* 36.365 d).

Usually Nun is considered as a source from which solar Being, Life, and Intellect appear, but in the Memphite theology Nun is regarded as a member of the hidden Ogdoad, that is, the eight principles which rest beyond Being and constitute the pre-archetypal inner articulation of the *deus invisibilis*, regarded as Ptah-Nun. At the noetic level, he reveals itself as the Creator, or the supreme Craftsman, an exact equivalent of the Platonic Demiurge in its functional and etymological respect. In this particular sense, Ptah is the second God, different from his own higher hypostasis which is *epekeina tes ousias*, i.e., the unspeakable unity of Nun and Naunet, the father and mother of Atum. As the second God, Ptah is Atum, the entire noetic cosmos called into existence by the divine Word (*medu neter: mdw ntr*) of Ptah. The sensible cosmos as the material body of the Creator, animated (like a hieratic statue) by various divine forces (*sekhemu; dunameis*), is the corporeal image (*tut; eikon*) of the celestial and hypercelestial realm. Therefore the sensible Egypt is a visible cultic body of the gods.

The gods themselves in their sensible forms of appearance are differentiated in nature and *eidos* according to established sacred iconography. But essentially they are rays of the transcendent divine light which passes through different ontological prisms and keeps the higher unity of all manifested multiplicity. Therefore there are different grades and orders (*taxeis*) of the gods. Some of them are regarded as "unborn" and thus closer to the One, while subsequent generations are regarded as "born".

The highest class of *neteru* are the gods of various Ogdoads located within the transcendent primordial Waters, i.e., beyond Being and before coming into existence. In Memphite theology, besides Nun and Naunet, Tatenen (the primeval hill) and Nefertum (the pre-existent principle which "later" stems from the primeval lotus as a solar deity) are mentioned, but they are united in the depths of supreme and ineffable Ptah. The Hermopolitan and Theban Ogdoads include such pairs as Nun and Naunet (the initial waters and inertia), Heh and Hehet (infinity), Kek and Keket (darkness), Niau and Niaunet (emptiness). The English renderings of these names are very approximate and imperfect. Instead of the last pair the Theban Ogdoad has Amun and Amunet (that which is hidden or invisible).

These eight principles are regarded as the fathers and mothers of Ra who comes forth from the primordial lotus and appears as the intelligible Sun. In this cosmogonical context, Ra is not to be viewed as a physical Sun, because Ra is the noetic *arche* which penetrates the solar globe and causes it to shine. Ra is not the visible sun-light, but that which provokes it, although the visible Sun is called Ra as well.

The lotus has its roots in mud (in the earth-like darkness), its stem in water, its leaves in air, and its flower gives birth to the noetic fire; therefore the primordial lotus symbolizes the archetypes of the four basic elements. According to Lucie Lamie, the Nun cannot be equated to an initial chaos in the Biblical sense.[24] As the eternal and infinite source of Being and of all the multi-dimensional universe (both intelligible and sensible), Nun is an equivalent to the Neoplatonic One. Though this most simple principle is beyond Being, it has a certain hidden metaphysical structure which is scrupulously discussed by such Neoplatonists as Damascius.

8. Levels of Being and Nonbeing

Like the Neoplatonists, the Egyptian priests regarded the cosmos as having originated not from nothingness but from oneness, from the One, viewed as an undifferentiated unity to which all manifested reality would return at the end of time. This oneness, which is analogous to Brahman and Atman of the *Upanishads* and unites the ineffable Source with Being, is Atum, the principle of pre-existence and intelligible totality, according to Heliopolitan theology.

Before coming into Being, Atum is floating in Nun and is identical with this primordial Ocean, the apophatic One itself, sometimes metaphorically decribed as "nothingness", "nonexistence", or "initial inertia". However, Nun is not a sort of chaos in the sense of a counterforce that threatened the cyclical course of the created cosmos: the threat is posed by the encosmic or inner cosmic nothingness, symbolized by the Sethian snake Apep, which does not belong with the existent.

The ineffable oneness, symbolized by the hypercosmic and hypernoetic Snake, sustains and regenerates the manifested world. This undifferentiated oneness is visualized as the "curled snake" (*mehen: mhn*) or "tail-in-mouth" (*sd-m-r*), the tail-swallower, called Ouroboros, whose body illustrates the beyond Being which encompasses the world continually on all-sides and serves as the invisible silent foundation of all ontological dimensions.

Jan Assmann distinguishes two kinds of chaos. He says:

"This fundamental Egyptian distinction is masked by the terminology of religious historians, with their inflationary use of the term 'chaos'".[25]

The Beyond Being is not "nonexistent" in the same sense as the inner cosmic nonbeing. Erik Hornung is inconsistent when he simply asserts that "the nonexistent is the inexhaustible, unrealized primal matter, the *pleroma*".[26] He confuses the hypernoetic oneness (or rather noetic *pleroma*) with primal matter (the Neoplatonic dyad). Thus, instead of discerning the different levels of the unlimited or those of "nonexistence", Nun is incorrectly equated to the principle of *apeiron* as an opposite to *peras:*

"One could say that in Egypt 'the nonexistent' signified quite generally that which is inchoate, undifferentiated, unarticulated, and unlimited; or, in affirmative form, the entirety of what is possible, the absolute, the definitive. In comparison with nonexistence, the existent is clearly defined, and articulated by boundaries and discriminations."[27]

If the existent is in need of constant regeneration from the depths of nonexistent, this nonexistent is to be understood not as a sort of irrational "chaos", but as a hidden source, the One in the Neoplatonic sense. The visible Sun, which represents the invisible Sun, Intellect, repeats the cosmogony of the first eternal Moment by rising up from Nut (Heaven, symbolized by the goddess' body) new every morning, but repeats it at the level of sensible cosmos, and this ceremonial sunrise is again repeated by the temple rites and alchemical initiations.

When in sleep humans dive down into the primordial waters, so as "to put off the old person and put on the new"[28], they emerge refreshed and rejuvenated every morning. This presumably "nonexistent" state is not "the unconscious" praised by E. Hornung, but something such as the Upanishadic *turiya*. Such cyclical return (in the realm of *neheh*) is a minor symbolic instance of the real theurgic return (*epistrophe*) performed on every level of existence by the king who is *Ra sa*, son of Ra, like the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) of the Sufis.

As has already been said, the stages of Nun, Atum-Ra and Osiris correspond to the three Plotinian *hupostaseis*: the One, Intellect, and Soul. The animated corporeal world is an image and material receptacle of higher divine forces (*sekhemu*).

Let us explore another analogy. The four-fold structure of reality is described in *Mandukya Upanishad* and related to the syllable AUM, seen as representing Brahman. These cosmogonical levels of reality are repeated as microcosmic stages of consciousness which exactly correspond to the main Plotinian stages of inward ascension to the One.

The letter A signifies the waking state, *vishva*. This is *viraj*, the world of external objects, the material cosmic body of the Egyptian divinity.

The letter U signifies the dreaming state of internal objects, i.e., the realm of *Hiranyagarbha*, the World-Soul, the Osirian kingdom called Duat or Amentet.

The letter M signifies *prajna*, the dreamless state of divine wisdom, the consciousness of Ishwara, the Demiurge. This is the archetypal domain of *Nous*, the creative principle and unity of divine Ideas, represented by Atum-Ra or any other Sun god who emerges from the lotus of transcendent silence.

The fourth stage is *turiya*, the silent source of all, called Brahman. This is the Egyptian Nun (or Ptah-Nun, the invisible Amun) and the Plotinian One, undifferentiated Absolute.

Creation or manifestation is a process through which the One became Many, through which the Monad developed into the Ennead (*psdt*), the archetypal metastructure of gods arranged at different levels of *kosmos noetos*. Therefore sensible reality is a shadow of the great Ennead repeated by other Enneads; it is an image reflection of the noetic and psychic reality of Ra-Osiris. The way of spiritual ascent leads back to the ultimate source. After leaving her mortal material body (*khat*), the soul (*ba*) tries to transcend the Osirian realm of alchemical transformations and restore her noetic identity, becoming *akh*, the intelligible light of Ra. As Atum-Ra she finally returns to the depths of Nun.

In this respect, the Upanishadic, Neoplatonic and ancient Egyptian metaphysical teachings are essentially the same, though different in articulation, modes of expression and points of emphasis. Therefore as the Orphic cosmogony can be interpreted in the terms of Neoplatonic philosophy, so the Egyptian cosmogonies may be understood in a similar way, without posing questions regarding the original "historical" pattern, though the Egyptian accounts are the oldest and most archaic in respect of their "ritualistic" background.

9. The Lord of Totality and His Magic

The hidden One is not disintegrated in his manifestation, but rather revealed and realized. Atum continues to exist at his own level as "the totality of the god's forms" (*CT* 75.3). Hence, the Egyptian gods are both transcendent and immanent. The noetic creation within the great Ennead establishes the fixed pattern of existence which remains the same in spite of all cyclic changes and dynamic dichotomies at the level of the sensible cosmos. The genealogy of being is to be equated to the development of diversity from unity. Before the irradiation of noetic, psychic, and sensible realms, all things were hidden potentialities within the primordial oneness, "living in one body, before two things had developed". Through the rising into Being the Monad developed into the Triad and differentiated itself into the infinite diversity of existence, though the One still remained the same pure One.

The name Atum (*j.tmw*) is a form of the verb *tm* and means both "complete, finish" and "not be". Thus Atum is both "complete" and "nonexistent". He is "the lord of totality" (*neb tem: CT* II.27b;353a), "the completed one" (*tnm: CT* II.174e) in the sense of All. As the sole Monad he transcends Being and Becoming (*kheper: hpr*). The universe in all its noetic, psychic and physical diversity is the *kheperu* of this source, the infinite modes of being into which the One has immanently developed and has been mirrored, while remaining in itself the hidden lord of all *kheperu*. Thus Atum is equated with the divine Scarab, Khepera, the shining primordial Being which is born from the darkness and appears as the theophanies. The *Pyramid Texts* address him as follows:

"Atum Scarab,
When you became high, as the high ground –
When you rose, as the Ben-ben [stone], in the Phoenix Enclosure, in Heliopolis –
You sneezed Shu ,
You spat Tefnut ,

> And you put your arms about them, as the arms of *ka*,
> That your *ka* might be in them" (*PT* 600).

The primordial embrace (repeated in spiritual initiation) means transmission of the life-force from the first Being to his first realizations and further manifestations. As the Monad from which everything developed, Atum contains within himself all *neteru* and is "the totality of god's forms". All that exists is "his million of *ka*", i.e., his vital energies.

Shu, as the first offspring of Atum, is an intelligible space or air within which the solar Intellect rises up. He is the established *topos* for all theophanies and all grades of being, who "developed (*kheper*) in the body of the self-developing God".[28]

The entire manifestation is the product of Atum's thought and utterance: "I became effective in my Heart (=Intellect)" and "*kheperu* became many in emergence from my mouth". Thus *kheperu* are his *logoi*, divine words (*medu neter*), as the manifested unity in multiplicity. "I used my own mouth – my identity is Heka", says Atum (*Bremner-Rhind* 28.22). Atum in his role of Heka pronounces:

"I acted as husband with my fist, my Heart came to me in my hand, ejaculation being fallen from my mouth" (*Bremner-Rhind* 28.27).

"After I developed as One God, that was three gods with respect to me" (ibid.,28.29).

The infinite variety of all manifestations can be summarized in the image of the great noetic Ennead (understood as a sum of the main creative paradigms, divine archetypes or gods, *neteru*) and traced back to the single Monad. The cosmic life is the ongoing recurrence of the eternal patterns of Life established *in illo tempore*. Atum's self-disclosure begins as an Idea and is given manifested reality through his utterance, *Logos*, which also means an irradiation of light. Heka is the principle through which a spoken command is translated into being. He "created the names of his parts" and declared:

> "All was mine before you developed, gods,
> Go down, you who came at the end.
> I am Heka" (*CT* 261.21-23).

Heka is the universal Magic of creation through the archetypal Ideas (names) or words of power (*hekau*). All things came into existence when the lord of totality (Atum) "took Hu in his mouth". Hu is a term derived from the verb *hww* – "to announce" and refers to the divine Word, the principle of miraculous creative speech: "speech which is so effective that it creates".

Hu forms a conceptual pair with the principle Sia, regarded as noetic Perception, *noesis*, or divine Wisdom. Due to this intelligible Perception, the Demiurge first perceives the universe as a collection of Ideas in his Heart. Through his creative Word (Hu), spoken in the darkness, Atum gives manifested reality to his Sia (*CT* VII.481g), thus acting as Heka. And Heka now is described as "father of the gods" who gave life to the Ennead. The great Heliopolitan Ennead comprise four levels of divine being: 1) Atum as the leading Monad of all genealogical chains, 2) Shu and Tefnut, 3) Geb and Nut (Earth and Heaven), 4) Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephtys. These members of the Ennead express and represent interdependence and causality at the archetypal level; they show the way of unfolding and handing down rulership from one generation of gods to the next (meaning from one ontological level to the next) until in the fifth generation Horus inherits rule.

10. Cosmogonical and Ontological Principles

Atum describes his pre-manifested state as "when I was one with Nun", floating in the dark abyss of the transcendent Waters. This hidden and ineffable state (*tnmw*) is without place (the lotus-throne) which is established by the opening of the Eye. The sending forth of the Eye and its coming back (as an archetypal *epistrophe*) are equivalent to the initial act of contemplation which makes the second Plotinian hypostasis (*Nous*). According to the *Coffin Texts*, the Eye is sent forth when Atum is still alone and hidden in the waters:

"Not finding a place in which I could stand or sit,
Before Heliopolis had been founded, in which I could exist;
Before the Lotus had been tied together, on which I could sit" (*CT* 80 48-50).

Through this shining light of the opened Eye a certain noetic *topos* is established, for the birth of Shu and Tefnut is described as taking place "in Heliopolis", i.e., at the noetic summit of Being. This primordial sacred drama cannot be understood as a linear sequence of events, because it transcends time altogether. Therefore the Eye is sent forth in search of Shu and Tefnut (sneezed and spat by Atum) whose emergence seems to be a consequence of the same search. As the soul of the initiate asserts in the *Coffin Texts*:

"It is I who am Shu, father of the gods,
In search of whom, together with my sister Tefnut,
Atum had sent his sole Eye.
I am the one who made it possible for it
To give brilliance to the Darkness.
It found me as a man of infinite number (*ȥnhh*, the same as *ȥn nhh*, a man of *neheh* = one who lives forever).
I am the begetter of repeated millions
Out of the Flood (*hhw*), out of the Waters (*nw*),

Out of the Darkness (*kkw*), out of *tnmw*" (*CT* 76.30-36).

The ascending human soul identifies herself as the self-disclosure of life-giving Shu:

> "I am the *ba* of Shu, the self-developing god:
> It is in the body of the self-developing god that I have developed
> I am the *ba* of Shu, the god mysterious of form (*sfg jrw:*" *CT* 75.1-3).

"I have developed" may be understood as "I came into being". Because the noetic space (sometimes imagined as a cube of light surrounded by the primordial Waters), or Shu, determines the extent of the manifested world, it can be regarded as *huparxis*.

Shu and Tefnut, as the first children of Atum, set in motion the entire chain of being (the Ennead). However, the light of Shu is a part of Atum's own self-disclosure or self-revelation. The pair of Shu and Tefnut, regarded as the product of Atum's masturbation, is analogous to the two Neoplatonic principles called the monad and the dyad "infinite in power" by Syrianus. In the metaphysical sequence of entities and categories, they appear immediately after the transcendent One, before even the realm of Being-Life-Intelligence is founded. Their prototypes are the Pythagorean principles of *peras* and *apeiron,* and they are causes of the wholes (*ton holon aitiai*) which reappear at every level of reality. According to A. D. R. Sheppard, Syrianus distinguishes between this transcendent monad and dyad, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the *automonas* and the *autoduas* which appear in the realm of intelligible Forms.[29] These Forms are the thoughts of Atum-Ra which constitute the Ennead. The pair of Shu and Tefnut also reappears at every level of manifestation. For Syrianus, the Love and Strife of Empedocles are the same as his two fundamental principles of monad and dyad (*In Metaph.*11.28ff; 93.6ff).

The initial pair of Shu and Tefnut is extended by a similar set of principles that inform the ancient Egyptian universe, for example, the dichotomy of permanence (the notion of manifestation as perfect, ideal and complete) and change (the notion of life as dynamic and recurrent). This pair resembles that of *to on* and *genesis*, and is expressed in two verbs: "exist" (*unun:wnn*) and "develop" (*kheper: hpr*). But instead of the sharp duality between perfect Being and imperfect Becoming, characteristic of Plato's philosophical thought, this dichotomy is found at every level of reality and is represented by the series of analogous pairs:

Tefnut-Shu
Order (*maat*)-Life (*ankh*)
Djet (Eternal Sameness)-*Neheh* (Eternal Recurrence)
Osiris-Ra
Unun (permanent and static being)-*kheper* (development)

Djet may be understood as an unchanging and permanent eternity, *neheb* – as a cyclic infinitude, eternal recurrence. They are joined by the royal Egyptian "history" as the third aspect of time:

"Your being is in the fullness of time (*neheb*),
Your image is permanence (*djet*),
Your *ka* (a double of soul, representing will, planning, conscience) is all that occurs".[30]

Attention should be paid to the fact that, contrary to the Pythagorean scheme, the feminine deity Tefnut is *peras* (limit, order, sameness, wisdom, *nous*) and the masculine deity Shu is *apeiron* (unlimited, life, multiplicity of manifestation). Therefore the first noetic triad is Atum-Shu-Tefnut. Atum is the apex of the triad, parallel to *huparxis*. Shu is Life (*zoe*) and Tefnut is Intellect (*nous*).

According to Ruth Majercik, philosophical speculations on the triad of Being, Life, Intellect ultimately derived from school interpretations of Plato's *Sophist* (248e). It may be true if we regard the Platonic tradition as a closed self-sufficient system and believe that Plato's texts are a sort of an archetypal *Qur'an* which contains everything, at least in seed. This attitude has been legitimately accepted by the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic hermeneutes, but the triad of *huparxis, zoe*, and *noesis*, attested in the *Chaldean Oracles*, must not be necessarily and exclusively "Platonic", if understood in a broader metaphysical sense. The members of this triad are related in accord with the axiom that "all is in all, but in each according to its proper nature". Porphyry equated the One with the Chaldean Father who is "once transcendent" (*hapax epekeina*) and argued that this Father in his simplicity contain three powers. According to John Lydus:

"For as the mystical doctrine (*ho mustikos logos*) says, the Once Transcendent (*hapax epekeina*) is a substantial Intellect (*ousiodes nous*) which remains in its own substance (*ousia*) and is turned toward itself while standing and abiding" (*De mensibus* 21.15-18).

For Porphyry, *huparxis, zoe*, and *noesis* are all acts (*energeiai*); therefore according to *huparxis, energeia* is standing at rest, according to *noesis, energeia* is turned toward itself, according to *zoe, energeia* inclines away from *huparxis*.[32] The later Neoplatonists separated this triad from the transcendent One as such and placed it at the level immediately beneath the ineffable One.

The paradoxical nature of Atum and his triad may be interpreted in both ways. But the Egyptians, as Erik Hornung pointed out, "did not create an abstract intellectual structure, but retained a pragmatic attitude to their ontology, using concepts they were able to live with".[33] The only explicit statement about the existent defines it as *neheb* and *djet*. *Neheb* carries solar atttributes of Ra and *djet* Osirian attributes – therefore Erik Iversen understands *neheb* as *Aion* in its philosophical definition.[34]

Nevertheless, we ought to consider different levels of Ra (the archetypal Sun and the visible Sun which maintains the flow of cyclic time) and different levels of *neheh*. The sensible realm is only a mirrored image of the noetic realm. The *Coffin Texts* assert as follows:

> "Shu is *neheh* and Tefnut is *djet*" (*CT* 80.7).
>
> "Life is his identity, Order is her identity" (*CT* 80.32-33).
>
> "I am Life, Lord of years,
> Life of *neheh*, Lord of *djet* –
> The eldest that Atum made with his efficacy,
> When he gave birth to Shu and Tefnut in Heliopolis,
> When he was one and developed into three,
> When he parted Geb from Nut,
> Before the first Corps (*ht*) was born,
> Before the two original Enneads developed
> And were existing (*wnn.snj*) with me" (*CT* 80.72-80).
>
> "I am *neheh*, father of an infinite number:
> My sister is Tefnut, daughter of Atum, who bore the Ennead.
> I am the one who bore repeated millions for Atum:
> That is *djet*, that is my sister Tefnut" (*CT* 78.4-7).

Maat (order, truth, right measure) is the name of Tefnut, and this principle makes the whole of existence possible. The unchanging pattern of the intelligible order derives from Atum, the One-Being which is *hen kai pan*. Things ("that which exist", *ntt wn*, i.e., *ta onta*) do not just exist (*unun*) as permanent essences, but also develop and change (*kheper*) into forms imbued with life (*ankh*) which coexists with order (*maat*). The lower levels of reality (for instance, the daily creation of new life) follow the fixed patterns established at the Beginning. Their relationship is the same as the relationship between archetypes and images, Platonic Ideas and sensible copies plunged into the ordered and cyclic stream of *genesis*.

For the Egyptians, "everything" means "that which is" (*ntt*) and "that which is not" (*iwtt*). The intelligible Creator, "who pronounces what is and creates what is not", is said to have "called that which exists into being" (*PT* 1146) and brought nonbeing into existence (*sekheper*). In accordance with Heliopolitan theology Atum acts as the supreme Creator and defines his relation to Ra, his Demiurge, in such words:

"I am Atum when alone in the primeval waters, I am Ra when he appears in glory and begins ruling what he has created".[35]

The *Coffin Texts* (*CT* 261.11) imply distinction between the Monad who is made functional and the Demiurge, "he who bore all" and whose command initiated the process of cosmic manifestation. The Monad, understood as the intelligible Creator, is called the Lord of All (*neb tem: nb tm*), the Only One (*ua: wʿ*), the Sole and Only One, or He who gave birth to that which is and that which is not (*ms ntt iwtt*). His indissoluble connection with the Demiurge is expressed as a relation between Atum and Ra (in Heliopolis), Ptah and Atum, or Ptah and Ra (in Memphis), Amun and Ra (in Thebes), Khnum and Ra (in Esnah), Suchos and Ra (in Fayum) and so on.

In the depths of Nun, before creation, things are in the state of *nnj*, which may be translated as "inert state", symbolized by lameness, weakness. This is the state of the elder Horus in the primeval waters. However, the shadow form of pre-existence seems to be completely different from that of the primordial gods engendering themselves "before existence existed".[36] Regarding the two distinct forms of existence (*ntt* and *iwtt*), E. Iversen provides the following commentary:

"The very existence of the two terms and their correlative and antithetic use demonstrates that the Egyptian theologians had already raised and considered the ontological problem of being versus non-being, which was later given great prominence in the controversial debate on being (*on)* and non-being (*me onta*) in the works of, for instance, Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle, although the fact that the Egyptians refer to the "making" and "producing" of non-being tends to show, that, contrary to Parmenides and Plato, they considered it to have real existence as an intelligible cosmic entity".[37]

However, we must be very careful with the terms presumably meaning "nothingness" and translated into English as "nonexistence", because they can simply signify the hidden or transcendent in respect to the subsequent lower levels of reality. Therefore J. Assmann, contrary to E. Hornung, maintains that:

"For the Egyptians, the cosmos was not suspended between nothingness and nothingness, nor did it emerge from nothingness. Surprisingly, the Egyptian concept of "nothingness" is not a part of the extracosmic or precosmic sphere but of the "inner cosmic". In Egyptian thought, the distinction between being and nothingness could only be understood in terms of the existing world, the ongoing process. In fact, this distinction represented the primary cosmogonic condition for a universe to take shape at all".[38]

11. Invisible God and His Theophanies

The Egyptian term *kheper* (to become, to develop, to come into being) is an antonym for *unun* (to exist, to persist). The term *kheper* is associated with the god Khepera or the divine Scarab which symbolizes the rising Sun (both noetic and sensible), rebirth and resurrection. By contrast, *unun* is related to Osiris Unun-nefer (*Wnn-nfr*), "who exists in completion", i.e., is a complete and restored unity of the permanent Form in its perfection, goodness and beauty. The term *kheperu* refers to any stage in the process of theophany, irradiation, emanation, or development; therefore *kheperu* are understood as the manifested realities, "creatures", effects of initial causes or any formal modes of being. For example, offerings for a deceased human being are given to his *khat* (corpse), to his *khaibit* (shadow), to his *ka* (double, vital and animating power), to his *ba* (soul), to his *akh* (noetic light, intellect, spirit), i.e., to all his *kheperu*. To make developments (*ara kheperu: jrj hprw*) means to grow up, to take a form. The *Coffin Texts* describe various "developments" as follows:

> "Become silent, gods, and I will tell you my development (or manifestation, transformation: *hprw.j*) myself.
> Don't ask of my development from the Waters (Nun).
> When the Waters saw me, I was already developed.
> He does not know where I developed.
> He did not see with his face how I developed.
> It is in the body of the great self-developing God that I have developed.
> He created me in his Heart,
> He made me in his efficacy,
> He exhaled me from his nose.
> I am exhale-like of form,
> Created by that self-developing God
> Who strews the Sky with his perfection,
> The totality of the God's forms,
> Whose identity the gods who sail him do not know" (*CT* 75.21-34).

According to Theban theology of the New Kingdom, the unknown and invisible God is Amun. In his transcendent mode Amun persists before and apart from the manifested universe. His identity or name (*ren*) is unknown. But as the cause and model (=*Ta-ten*, the primordial hill) of existence Amun is the "manifested one" (*ba*), "glittering of forms" (*tjhnt jrw*), who can be comprehended through his epiphanies, manifestations, creations, and multiplicity of forms. The word "forms" (*aru: jrw*) originated from the verb "to make" (*ara: jrj*). But the Creator himself must be uncreated, and this is usually expressed by the term "self-created", i.e., he who created his own egg from his own substance. The hidden process of self-generation applies not only to the invisible Amun "whose appearance is unknown", but also extends to lower manifestations, sacred icons and processional images. Amun is the hidden God whose symbols, images, and names are the many gods. Hence, he is both transcendent and immanent. On the one hand he is ineffable and independent of his creation, on the other, as a pre-existing Being in whom all existence was inherited, he is the self-developing Creator by whose self-revelation all *kheperu* are evolved. According to the *Leiden Papyrus:*

"The one who created himself, whose appearance is unknown.
Perfect aspect, which developed into a sacred emanation.
Who built his processional images and created himself by himself.
Perfect icon (or beautiful image, *sekhem nefer*), whom his heart made perfect.
Who knit his fluid together with his body
To bring about his egg in isolation.
Development of development (*kheperu kheperu*), model of birth
Who finished himself in proper order" (*CT*.350.400).

However, in the same *Leiden Papyrus* it is clearly stated:

All the gods are three:
Amun, Ra, and Ptah, without their seconds.
His identity is hidden in Amun,
His is Ra as face,
His body is Ptah" (ibid.300).

If we take into account that instead of "physical" nature or "nature" understood in the modern and profane sense, all sensible reality of the Egyptians amounted to a number of heliophanies (irradiations of the divine light), when Amun, Ra and Ptah indeed constitute a clear analogy to the Neoplatonic One, Intellect, and Soul, interpreted in the Orphic manner as the Olympian gods Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus. The different divine epithets refer to the multiplicity of "faces" (*hru:hrw*) which the gods have at their disposal. The Egyptian Creator reveals himself in his creation, but he is not absorbed into it: Amun, Ra, and Ptah, with their multiplicity of names and epiphanies cannot be without reservations identified with everything that exists here below as images and symbols. Therefore Egyptian ontology is not pantheistic in the modern and rather naïve ordinary sense, but resembles the Neoplatonic hierarchy of different though closely related ontological orders (*taxeis*).

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2 Christos C. Evangeliou *The Hellenic Philosophy: Between Europe, Asia, and Africa,* Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton: Binghamton University, 1997, p.95

3 L. M. de Rijk *Causation and Participation in Proclus. The Pivotal Role of Scope Distinction in his Metaphysics.*- On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy, ed. by E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer, Leiden: E. J. Bril, 1992, p.4

4 Werner Beierwaltes *Image and Counterimage? Reflections on Neoplatonic Thought with Respect to its Place Today.*- Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in honour of A. H. Armstrong ed. by H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus, London: Variorum, 1981, p.239

5 Dominic J. O'Meara *The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus.*- The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.78

6 Pierre Hadot *L'etre et l'etant dans le neoplatonisme.*- Revue de theologie et philosophie 23, 1973, pp.101-113

7 Kevin Corrigan *Essence and Existence in the Enneads.*- The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus, ed. by Lloyd P. Gerson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.107

8 ibid., p.106

9 Pierre Hadot *The Harmony of Plotinus and Aristotle according to Porphyry.*- Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence, ed. by Richard Sorabji, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, p.128

10 Andrew Smith *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism,* The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p.11

11 Gregory Shaw *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus,* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p.119

12 *Proclo. Lezioni sul "Cratilo" di Platone*, traduzione di Francesco Romano, Catania/Roma, 1989, pp.133-136

13 On the modern abuse of the ideas of the concrete and the abstract see: Frithjof Schuon *Logic and Transcendence*, London: Perennial Books, 1975, pp.19-32. His arguments run as follows:

"All reality not physically or psychologically tangible, although perfectly accessible to pure intellection, is described as being 'abstract' with a more or less disparaging intention, as though it were a matter of distinguishing between dream, or even deception, and reality, or healthiness of mind. Substance, that which exists of itself, is regarded as 'abstract', and the accidental as 'concrete'; it is imagined that an idea of the suprasensible is obtainable exclusively through abstraction, by discounting contingencies, a notion not devoid of meaning on the logical plane, but which is false on the level of intellection. (…) if, on the one hand, Being appears to the mind and in relation to things as an abstraction, it nevertheless constitutes the objective and concrete reality which inspires the abstract notion, or, in other words, it is the most concrete reality possible. The notion of Being is either a relatively direct reflection of Being in pure intelligence, or else it is an indirect trace of Being in the reason; in the latter case one may say that Being is 'abstract', because the thinking subject takes as its point of departure things which 'are' or, more precisely, which 'exist', and that without these things abstraction would be inconceivable; but for direct Intellection, which starts from an innate and prelogical certainty (prelogical in a positive, 'emanationist', and not evolutionist sense) consciousness of Being is 'something of Being itself', inasmuch as it grasps a ray proceeding from it; this Intellection is therefore quite different from a rational operation. From this point of view Being reveals itself as a 'consciousness' before appearing as a 'notion', and it is not necessarily associated with existing phenomena: in the mirror of the Intellect, Being is dazzlingly evident, comparable at one and the same time to the geometrical point and to limitless space" (pp.19-21).

14 L. M. de Rijk, ibid., p.12

15 Carlos G. Steel *Iamblichus and the Theological Interpretation of the Parmenides.*- Syllecta Classica, vol.8, Iamblichus: the Philosopher, University of Iowa, 1997, p.18

16 ibid., p.23

17 ibid., p.28

18 P. A. Meijer *Participation in Henads and Monads in Proclus' Theologia Platonica III. CHS.1-6.* – On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy, ed. by E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992, p.78

19 L. M. de Rijk, ibid., p.13

20 A. Hilary Armstrong *Platonic Mirrors.*- Eranos 1986, Jahrbuch, vol.55, Frankfurt am Maine: Insel Verlag 1988, pp.180-181

21 James P. Allen *Genesis in Egypt. The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts,* Yale Egyptological Seminar, New Haven:Yale University, 1988, p.63

22 Erik Iversen *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1984, p.11

23 ibid., p.24

24 Lucie Lamie *Egyptian Mysteries. New Light on Ancient Knowledge,* London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p.10

25 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs,* tr. by Andrew Jenkins, New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2002, p.206

26 Erik Hornung *Conception of God in Ancient Egypt.* The One and the Many, tr. by John Baines, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1982, p.182

27 ibid., p.183

28 James P. Allen, ibid., p.17

29 A. Sheppard *Monad and Dyad as Cosmic Principles in Syrianus.*- Soul and the Structure of Being in Late Neoplatonism. Syrianus, Proclus and Simplicius, ed. by H. J. Blumethal and A. C. Lloyd, Liverpool: Liverpool U P, 1982, p.2-3

30 Jan Assmann, ibid., p.243

31 Ruth Majercik *The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism.*- The Classical Quarterly 42 (II), 1992, p.479

32 Pierre Hadot *Porphyre et Victorinus I*, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1968, pp.132-138

33 Erik Hornung, ibid., p.184

34 Erik Iversen, ibid., p.18

35 ibid., p.14

36 ibid., p.17

37 ibid., p.18

38 Jan Assmann, ibid., p.206

RITUALS OF DEIFICATION AND THEURGIC ASCENT

1. Depreciation of Hieratic Rites

In the modern studies of ritual the transcendent is often confused with the infra-human. Usually ritual is defined as a behavioural pattern deprived of its primary "unritualized" model and functioning as a means of communication. The psychoanalytic approach views sacred ritual in the context of collective neurosis, imagining ritual as a means to flee from a complicated "reality" one cannot accept and therefore negates, thus escaping utter madness.

Those who are educated according to the modern paradigms of an individualistic self-expression and self-indulgence, or rather false "spontaneity", misunderstand ritual altogether, regarding it as a "mere ceremony", a matter of surface rather than depth, of outward (dissembling) representation rather than inward transformation. However, by classing ritual with superstition, shallow and thoughtless action, or with an "idolatrous" habit, the Protestants and their modern followers perform their own "ritual of negation", a rite of "rationalistic exorcism", unaware of the ontological nature of ritual, namely, that being itself, including our human life, is a sacred rite *par excellence.*

From the perspective of "sacrificial" divine manifestation (*proodos, kheperu*), ritual is similar to the demiurgic rhythm of creation, to the dynamics of the organized cosmos, including all cycles of life and death, evolution and involution, day and night, and so on. In a sense, *Mahashakti,* or Maya (Isis-Hathor), in her ritual play, breathes, dances, or weaves the entire universe as the irradiation of archetypal possibilities of Ishwara, Atman (Atum).

The ritual action is an order-making and structure-giving action which follows divine paradigms or noetic archetypes, thus producing temporal sequences or chains of images. At the human level, where the cosmic duality of Horus and Seth determines all earthly dramas and tragedies, only the "ritualized" conformity to the archetypal patterns of order and truth may help to subdue and control the chaotic tendencies of entropy, thus providing sacred links with rejuvenating spiritual sources. Otherwise only the Post-modern nightmare of "simulation" and certain *froliche wissenschaft* is left, thus equating the whole reality with a simulacrum without any transcendent paradigm.

If the image only masks "the absence of a basic reality" and, being its own pure simulacrum, "bears no relation to any reality whatever", as J. Baudrillard maintains, then there is no more Truth and no more Reality.[1] This triumph of *isefet* ("lack", manifested by sickness, disorder, injustice, falsehood, and loss of the meaning of creation) means the death of any traditional philosophy as well, because every sign only redoubles itself behind the empty allusion of what it designates. J. Baudrillard says:

"All the values of a civilization, of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs. Everything becomes undecidable."[2]

For the Protestants, only "empty" ritual had no purpose; for the Postmodernists, reality itself is a dream within a dream. But since God is proclaimed to be an ideological fancy which should be removed, there is no hope of awakening. In this respect, it is useful to remember the wise assertion of F. Schuon:

"True, the world is a dream, but this dream is not ours since we are contents of it; the absolute Subject escapes us as much as does the absolute Object, hence as much as their supreme indistinction".[3]

"Ritual" and "spontaneity" may be viewed as reflections of *peras* and *apeiron*, limit and infinity, the ordering force of Maat and the unrestricted breath of Shu. Their interchanging dialectic presents itself on every level of existence, though when their lower images are deviated from the archetypal source, they are turned into 1) an "empty ceremony", an inhuman rationalistic mania, culminating in all kinds of terror and 2) false freedom or pseudo-spontaneity (especially praised by modern artists). As F. Schuon aptly remarks:

"But when divine influences have withdrawn from a religious cult, and only the psychic entity remains, abandoned to itself and its ignorant servants – who are thereby all the more impassioned – it becomes a veritable monster and serves as a dwelling place for tenebrous influences; this explains why hideous apparitions have been seen escaping from shattered idols".[4]

2. Rituals and Sacred Masks

Lacking speech and therefore resisting decipherment, ritual, according to the Protestant perspective, is sheer nonsense. To place the whole of religion in external rites is stupidity, because there is nothing behind the masks of movements and gestures. As J. Z. Smith pointed out:

"The study of ritual was born as an exercise in the 'hermeneutic of suspicion', an explanatory endeavour designed to explain away".[5]

In their attempts to fight Catholicism, the Protestants tried to present the ritual activities of Catholics as "verbal translations" of the Pagan models: "By a change only of Name they have found the means to return to the Thing".[6] This ugly controversy against rituals and sacred images, jointly held by humanists, reformers, and philosophers, "marked the study of religion as, essentially, a Protestant exercise, a heritage that continues to haunt theorists of religion even to the present day".[7]

J. P. Singh Uberoi, himself partly following Max Weber, insists that the decisive step to the generation of modern Western science is not so much the disfigured Hermetic pursuits, but the radical change in Christian ritual and liturgy, i.e., in the mode of presence of divinity and interpretation of symbol. Exploring how the rise to a distinctive modern world view became possible, he argues:

"Zwingli insisted that in the utterance 'This is my body' (*Hoc est corpus meum*) the existential word 'is' (*est*) was to be understood, not in a real, literal and corporeal sense, but only in a symbolical, historical or social sense (*significat, symbolum est or figura est*)… Zwingli had discovered or invented the modern concept of time in which every event was either spiritual and mental or corporeal and material but no event was or could be both at once… Spirit, word and sign had finally parted company for man at Marburg in 1529; and myth or ritual… was no longer literally *and* symbolically real and true".[8]

Since Europe followed Zwingli in this event, symbol was separated from reality and subsequently a new language was brought into being with respect to ritual. Instead of sometimes being "idolatrous" and sometimes "true", now all rituals are regarded as "merely symbolic" and ultimately shallow. This striving for a "pure spirituality", devoid of any sacramental dimension, establishes a sort of dualism between sentimental religious humanism and demonized nature. Quite paradoxically, it ends in an opaque and blind materialism based on the limited standpoint of *ego*, or *persona*, in the sense of a false mask which imprisons rather than liberates. Since human beings consciously or unconsciously identify themselves with their social, psychosomatic, and imaginal roles, these false masks (involved in the pseudo-rituals of profane existence) conceal their true identities. On the contrary, the sacred mask (for example, the golden mask of Horus, Hathor, or Anubis, worn by Egyptian priests) serves as a means of invoking divine presence and symbolising transfiguration. According to T. Burckhardt:

"But to return to the sacred mask as such: it is above all the means of a theophany; the individuality of its wearer is not simply effaced by the symbol assumed, it merges into it to the extent that it becomes the instrument of a superhuman 'presence'. For the ritual use of the mask goes far beyond mere figuration: it is as if the mask, in veiling the face or the outward ego of its wearer, at the same time unveiled a possibility latent within him. Man really becomes the symbol that he has put on, which presupposes both a certain plasticity of soul and a spiritual influence actualized by the form of the mask. In addition, a sacred mask is generally regarded as a real being; it is treated as if it were alive; and it is not put on until certain rites of purification have been performed".[9]

At the end of libations and offerings the Babylonian priest assures that sacrifice ("this deed") was done by all the gods, not by him or any other human being in their mortal aspect. Egyptian temple liturgy and ritual are also understood not as a communication between the human and the divine, but rather as an interaction of the gods themselves, performed by Horus, Thoth, Anubis and other deities. The priests during the rites are turned into the sacred vessels for the *bau* of these gods. The presentations (*hetep, hotep*), around which the ritual drama is staged, are equated with the Eye of Horus which symbolizes spiritual integration and union (accomplished by the wisdom of Thoth) after disintegration and falling into pieces.

Egyptian cosmography depicts the course of the Sun (Ra) using sacramental interpretation of this both cosmogonical and cultic process. Therefore the temple ritual (which follows archetypal patterns of the solar circuit and rebirth) brings the divine effects down to earth: the god descends (*hai*) on his image (*sekhem*), comes as a spirit (*akh*) to unite with his form in his sanctuary "with glittering feathers and the *bau* of the gods with him". During the ritual called "uniting with the Sun" (*henem aten*), the divine substance unites with the material receptacle, or image. Likewise the purified human being becomes a vessel of sacred energies and is united with the Sun, or Intellect.

If existence is an expression of Being, that is, manifestation of intelligible light and sound, produced by the creative utterance of Atum, which includes the all-pervasive power of Heka, then, as a result, everything is more or less divine. Therefore to contemplate the sacred (constantly revealed and confirmed by rituals) "means to perceive symbols, archetypes and essences in sensible things, for the beauties perceived by an interiorized soul become factors of interiorization".[10]

Contrary to the "opaque" perspective of contemporary empiricism, those events that the modern man would regard as "inner" psychic or spiritual events, are experienced as "outer" events by the ancients. Therefore J. Naydler, perhaps partly following H. Corbin, coined the term a "public imagination" – a public inner life experienced as an objective vision. He argues, concerning Ancient Egyptian times:

"This means that the experience of what was 'real' and what was 'not real' was different from our experience. The outer and the inner worlds were not so strictly partitioned, and as a result, the experience of the physical was much richer – it was infused with inner, spiritual qualities that today we would prefer to regard as subjective projections. At the same time, their experience of the spiritual was much more concrete, much more 'objective', by which term we should understand 'shared'".[11]

Cultic activities are regarded as a response to ever-present divinity and a genuine encounter with its manifestations in the specific form of their theurgic indwelling. If the liturgy is suspended, the divine powers may withraw, leaving behind only the inanimate material receptacle.

J. Assmann discusses three main dimensions of contact with the divine and of the divine presence itself, that is 1) cultic, 2) cosmic (understood as a hierophany), and 3) mythic (by which is meant a sacred tradition: myths, names, genealogies).[12] When Osiris is praised as King of the gods with 1) many names, 2) sacred embodiments, and 3) mysterious cult statues in the temples, name, embodiment, and cult statue refer to the mythic, cosmic, and cultic dimensions respectively. However, this classification is not correct when all three dimensions are regarded as "cultic", because the creation of the world by the Word is staged as a ritual. In addition, the divine presence manifests itself as mystical inner vision and the "cardial" comprehension (*gnosis*). It may be contemplated through the epiphanic figure of the pharaoh or the sage. Since the world is woven from theophanies and divine traces, the realization of this ontological truth allows one to see God everywhere. He is revealed through the constant play of great (*uru*) and small (*nadjesu*) deities and their powers.

Such gnostic vision sees through the physical landscape, itself ultimately constituted by the noetic irradiations of Atum-Ra, into its interiority. F. Schuon describes this sacramental vision as the result of reciprocity: when we withdraw towards the inward, God manifests itself for us in the outward:

"Thus, when man interiorizes himself, God so to speak exteriorizes Himself while enriching man from within; there lies all the mystery of the metaphysical transparency of phenomena and of their immanence in us".[13]

The gods and their powers (*sekhemu*) may be experienced through purified and transformed human qualities, attributes, and actions which are reflections of divine qualities. The ability to dance and chant joyful sacred hymns means to experience the presence of Hathor. To practise hieroglyphic writing, calligraphy and painting, to contemplate divine images and to act wisely in all circumstances means to experience the archetypal qualities of Thoth and his consort Sesheta.

3. Climbing to the Divine State

Some contemporary scholars argue that religious ritual depends on an antecedent "idea" which, however, is no longer understood and whose deeper meaning remains hidden. Contrary to this belief, W. Burkert maintains that ritual is far older than linguistic communication – therefore there is no justification for regarding the "idea" as anterior or decisive for ritual, though certain ideas may be contained in ritual and communicate "the reality of a hidden, transcendent power or the sacredness of life".[14]

W. Burkert says that ritual has no "purpose" and the ideas that can be extracted by interpreting a ritual cannot explain its origin. The evolutionary approach of this author and his reductionist understanding of an "idea" prevent him from seeing that hieratic rites are established in accord with divine Ideas and follow metaphysical patterns of demiurgy which can only be regarded as a "myth" at the level of expression.. The dependence of myth on ritual cannot be understood as a proof that sacred myths cannot be based on noetic realities and archetypes.

From the traditional point of view, ritual action is no longer personal, because the spiritual power mediated and manifested through the correctly performed ritual (itself regarded as being transmitted by revelation) can be "real" only if the rite is performed by the gods themselves, i.e., if it is "theurgic" in the etymological sense of the word.

It is true that the ways of life of ancient men were determined by rituals which shaped mythic patterns, but to say that ritual is without an intelligible purpose (because by means of interpretation one can attribute ideas to any action) is a sheer nonsense. Since life itself is a kind of ritual which involves birth and death (moreover, *apotheosis* and rebirth are always preceded by death), no wonder that, for the ancient world, hunting, sacrifice, and war were symbolically interchangeable:

"The pharaoh and Heracles could be lord of the hunt, lord of the sacrifice, and warrior".[15]

More important is the fact that the pharaoh, as an *imago dei*, should have lived a life whose every detail was ritualized and thereby served as a paradigm of the holy life, or way of life (*bios*), aimed at a theurgic return to the solar Intellect through the sacrifice ("death", which becomes an initiation), participation in divine Forms and re-union with the divine Sun. A. K. Coomaraswamy argues that the ancient Egyptian doctrine of the Sundoor (the way of liberation through the pneumatic rays that proceed and return to the midst of the Sun which is Death itself) is essentially the same as the Indian.[16] The ladder of Horus, himself represented by the king and the initiate, who starts his alchemical journey to the Osirian Netherworld, is the ritual instrument (actually used in Orphic initiation rites as well) and the symbol of ascent. The Egyptian concepts of Amun-Ra, or Atum-Ra, are equivalent to the Indian concepts of Atman, Surya, and Indra-Vayu.[17]

Since sacrifice is a symbolic death, meaning return to the Principle and reaffirmation of intelligible Life, one could say that in every sacrifice the Principle is "fed" by the spiritual aspect of the victim, or of its *ba* which is returned to its source as a ray is to the Sun. In a sense, the sacrificer "kills" himself as a particular and separate manifestation. Thereby he returns his life to the universal Source that gave it. The Source itself, as a supreme unity, is Death for any manifested particularity, but this Death does not die and is the chief agent of immortality and rebirth.

According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, the Sun "who slays and quickens", is both Breath and Death, the Person in the Solar Orb, who plants his feet in the heart and when he withdraws them, the creature dies.[18] Those feet are the rays of Ra, the life-breath of Shu, or Amun, the invisible Sun. The initiated sacrificer becomes ritually dead to his mortal self which is sacrificed, or exchanged, for the immortal divine *eidos*.

Like all metaphysical passages, this "climbing" to the divine state is at the same time a kind of death and rebirth, be it 1) sacrificial and initiatory death which leads to regeneration provided by the hieratic rite, or 2) that real death following which man enters Duat and, as an image of Osiris, is united with the archetypal Osiris. Both cases are prototypes of the philosophical separation of the soul from the mortal body that leads to the divine presence, accessible only to the contemplative soul not dominated by passion and other Sethian qualities.

Since all living beings are sustained by the qualities of *neteru*, by their powers and attributes that constitute an existence as such, the contents of consciousness are not the "subjective" possessions of those who experience them, but are only a temporal identification with the particular divine or daimonic *eidos*, power, energy, and will, be it blissful to or destructive of the individual receptacle. Therefore the question of one's real identity is crucial, and ritual serves as a regulator and healer of consciousness. Through the ritualized action one becomes a mediator of the divine, identifying oneself part by part with different deities or imbuing oneself with the *ba* and *sekhem* of one particular god. For example, in the *Book for the permanence of Osiris, giving breath to the Inert One in the presence of Thoth, and repelling the enemy of Osiris* (*BD* 182) the initiate says:

"I am Thoth, the skilled scribe whose hands are pure, a possessor of purity, who drives away evil, who writes what is true, who detests falsehood, whose pen defends the Lord of All; master of law who interprets writings, whose words establish Two Lands… I am Thoth, the favoured of Ra; Lord of strength who ennobles him who made him; great of *heka* in the Barque of Millions of Years… I am Thoth; I have performed the night-ritual in Letopolis".

By identifying each part of the body with a god, the initiate "constructs" his divine body. Likewise the mummy (which represents symbolically an ideal body, *sah*) is "constructed" as a wrapped (*ut*) scarab, a "logogram" for *neteru*. The iconic symbols (so-called amulets) laid out on its bodily parts really are like the Neoplatonic *sunthemata* or the equivalents to the divine names which belong to the noetic semiotics of the Demiurge. Since the sequence of ritual postures and deeds is the sequence of *medu neter*, embodied in the dynamic "irradiation" of gestures, sounds and sacred forms themselves, the rite-performing priest becomes a vehicle of *heka* power which transcends the level of mundane existence. By invoking and identifying himself with the archetypal patterns of *tep sepi*, the priest makes himself into a kind of hieroglyph, or mysterious *sunthema*, which participates in the demiurgic power of Ra.

Similarly, the Duat traveller in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* can perform a series of miraculous transformations, turning at will into a variety of animals that serve as vehicles and symbols of different gods belonging to different chains of manifestations (*bau*). Since the

Netherworld is a kind of *mundus imaginalis*, the transformations are not physical, but rather semiotic. They occur within the text-like body-temple of Osiris, thereby showing the spectre of archetypal possibilities and their related energies. To be turned into a swallow means to become a *sunthema* of Hathor; to be turned into a crocodile means to become a mediator of powers attributed to Sobek. Ultimately, we are dealing here with the *medu neter* – their compositions, interrelations, semantics, creative *heka* powers and their iconography – all of them within the frame of reality similar to a written Text, itself manifested as a rite of existence which strictly follows divine archetypes.

Therefore a ritualized action is not a human action (which by itself tends to disorder, *isefet*), but occurs in the realm of *neteru* and displays the relationship between the gods and their unifying powers. In some respects, Heka may be equated with Maya, understood as "divine art", and the miraculous power of any creation or transformation (*ma* in Sanskrit means "measure", like the Egyptian *maat* which is the supreme measure of theophany and all manifested things). According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, it can be rendered as "Magic" with considerable reservations: the world is a product of Maya; however, the *maya-vada* doctrine does not simply regard our phenomenal world as a delusion, but as "...a theophany and epiphany by which we are deluded if we are concerned with nothing but the wonders themselves", i.e., if we are unable to see the archetypal Thaumaturgus, or Operator-himself, concealed by his art (*mayaya*).[20]

4. Cosmos and the Sacred Harmony of Strings

The Latin word *sacrum* and its derivations may signify not only a sacred thing, sacred rite, liturgy, but also a hidden or secret thing (like the Greek *musterion*) and sacrifice. *Sacrificium* means "making sacrifice" or "making sacred", because ritual itself is sacred. It provides the operative rules for all kinds of "sacredness" and establishes sacred attributes of tradition which tries to keep, preserve, and restore the world-order (the semantic meta-structure of myth-like existence, imagined as a dynamic cosmic mandala) by imitating the rite of primeval creation. Therefore ritual is akin to the established cosmic order, the exemplary rules of behaviour and traditional law.

The Latin word *ritus* means not only religious rite or ceremony, but also the paradigmatically established form, order, habit. The same root appers in *reor* – to calculate, think, and *ratio* – reason, meaning, method, way, teaching, system.

The Vedic term *rta* (*rita*) is congeneric to the Latin *ritus* and means the highest principle of manifested being: its order and truth, opposed to disorder (*an-rta*). Both *ritus* and *rta* are related to the Indo-european root *ar-* (to join, to bind, to arrange). Like the Egyptian *maat, rta* is the cosmos-forming ritua;, therefore the universe made by this miraculous rite (*kriya*) is well-built and measured, like a ploughed field (Lithuanian *arimas*, from the verb *arti*, to plough). This manifested (by the moving force of *ratha rtasya*, the wheel of order) cosmos, likened to the beautiful cultic statue (*agalma*), is "harmonious". The Latin *ars* (art) and the Greek *harmonia* (order, relationship, organized structure) stem from the same root. According to the Pythagorean Philolaus, quoted by Nicomachus of Gerasa:

"Nature in the cosmos is composed of a *harmonia* between the unlimited and the limited and so too is the whole cosmos and everything in it."[21]

Philolaus explains *harmonia* by equating it to an octave, or *dia pason*, literally, the interval which runs "through all notes". He continues:

"Things that are alike and of the same race had no need of *harmonia*; but it was necessary for things that are dissimilar and not of the same race and not of equal standing to be locked together by *harmonia* so that they might be held together in a cosmos".[22]

The word *kosmos* itself means a perfect arrangement, from the verb *kosmeo* – to arrange, adorn, dress. Therefore *kosmema* is an ornament, and *kosmetikon* – cosmetics. The cosmos-forming ritual establishes *harmonia*, say, an equilibrium between Horus and Seth which leads to transcendent union (*sema*, or *henosis*). And the cosmic principles of harmony, reciprocity, proportion, and analogy are the means by which the sacred rite is operative.

The Greek word for ritual is *telete*. It means an accomplishment (telos) of the full cyclical movement in a perfect intelligible circle (*kuklos*, skr. *cakra*), like the trajectory which the solar barque of Ra traverses. This noetic circle, as a paradigm of cosmic order and ritual, represents an "archetypal iconostasis", or an "ideal theurgic whole", as V. N. Toporov used to say.[23] According to the Russian Orthodox writer P. Florensky, this "theurgic plenitude" is to be regarded as containing the fullness of all possible meaning and, therefore, being the supreme aim of human life, as well as the maternal repository of all arts and all sciences, similar to the "intelligible book" of Thoth. According to this view, the birth of myth is regarded as "the first breach in theurgy". When the theurgic plenitude is lost by separation, differentiation, individualization and "fall", viewed as a kind of "metaphysical catastrophe", the primordial unity is damaged and "theurgy" (once meaning all human activities without exception) is reduced to special ritual actions, the "cult" in the narrow sense of this word.[24]

However, this cult still affords an access to the life-giving noetic fullness of *arche*, the Egyptian *tep sepi*, and it uses all means provided by the hieratic arts and sciences that formerly constituted the theurgic unity but now are scattered like the limbs of Osiris. The sounds produced by the seven spheres (analogous to the seven Hindu chakras and seven steps of Mesopotamian zikkurat), imitated by the priests, are especially important in the ritual practices of the Graeco-Roman world. Nicomachus of Gerasa argues that the circuit of sounds is said to be twenty-eight in number, "according to the convention of the Egyptians", and regards it as a secret doctrine not to be spoken aloud by the wise. He says:

"Wherefore the note has the same power as the monad has in arithmetic and the point has in geometry. These elements are combined with material substances (as, for example, vowels are combined with consonants), just as the soul is combined with the body and *harmonia* is combined with the strings. When the soul is combined with the body, it produces living things; when *harmonia* is combined with the strings, it produces keys and melodies, these combinations being the active and consummating production of the gods. Wherefore, whenever the initiates pay reverence to such an act, they invoke it symbolically with sigmas and clickings and inarticulate and meaningless sounds."[25]

The Demiurge is the chief Ritual-Performer whose actions ("rhythms and melodies") are imitated by the pharaoh and the priest who substitutes for the pharaoh in cultic service. Hence, to be liberated, in this theurgic sense, means to join the solar barque of Ra and be involved thereby in the eternal ritual of creation, performed by Ra. The "liberated" ba simply recognizes itself as a ray of Ra, or rather as the intelligible Ra himself, because God (being at once ineffable and named by all names) is Heka, the single hidden Operator.

The one who arranged everything that is here visible by invisible arts and skilfully executed every soul by the proportions of *harmonia*, is the Demiurge, according to Aristides Quintilianus. However, we can call him Pure Form, Proportion, Unit, or Unitary Proportion, "succeeding thereby in showing in the one term that he arranges and sets in order all things and in revealing in the other term that he has made an end of many and disparate things and has through indissoluble bounds gathered them together in one" (*De musica* I.3).

5. On the Wing of Thoth: the Theurgic Way of Ra

Following the patterns of ancient cultic practices, Iamblichus regarded theurgy as being an inverse imitation of cosmogony, arguing that all demiurgic powers engaged in the soul's descent into the body may function as elevating forces. Both descent and ascent consist in ritualized actions of divine powers. Therefore the corporeal dimension itself is constructed by the "geometrizing" descent of *neteru* and their corporeal receptacles or symbols. Since the theurgic symbols are elements of a hieratic performance held on the universal scale, they give the soul "the ineffable power of the gods" (*he arrhetos dunamis ton theon: De Myster.*96.19-97.2).

This *dunamis* (analogous to Egyptian *sekhemu* and Indian *shakti*) serves as a vehicle of ascent. Sacred chants, or invocations, are imbued with transforming and elevating power, leading to the Sun. According to the Hindu text, cited by A. K. Coomaraswamy, "they made the Sun their goal and ran a race", and this race "is imitated in the rite" (*PB* IX.1.35).[26] In order to reach "the Gander seated in the Light", the sacrificer mounts to the celestial realm with the verse, "like a ship", according to the *Aitareya Brahmana* (IV.20-22), using "feet" that are the metrical units of the elevating chant:

"Just as men set sail on the ocean so they set sail to perform a year or a twelve-day rite, just as men desiring to reach the other shore mount a ship well found, so do they mount the Tristubhs (chants)".[27]

This way is also the theurgic way to Ra, literally meaning "end", according to A. K. Coomaraswamy,[28] i.e., the end of the world, of the road, and of the Year, the circle of the cultic Year being the theurgic circle. The sacrificer enters the Year as the archetypal circle of his ontology, because the two ends of Year, when united, constitute an endless Chant which is like the Egyptian Ouroboros, a snake biting its tale (*sed em ra*). By passing through the Year, a ritual of descent and ascent, of death and resurrection, is performed. Thereby the sequence of seasonal and daily rhythms is viewed as a kind of magnificent rite in which men participate. The end of the Year is related to the doors of Heaven, opened for the ascending pharaoh in the *Pyramid Texts*:

"The doors of the firmament are thrown open at dawn for myself.

I go up into the Field of Rushes,

I bathe in the Field of Rushes.

I am pure, I take to myself my iron bones, I stretch out [for myself] my imperishable limbs which are in the womb of my mother Nut. O Ra, give me your hand…" (*PT* 325).

"Hail to you, daughter of Anubis, who is at the windows of the sky, the companion of Thoth, who is at the uprights of the ladder. Open my way that I may pass" (*PT* 304).

"… I will leap up and put myself on the wing of Thoth…" (*PT* 270).

"The face of the god is open to me…" (*PT* 271).

If the word "irrational" is understood in its usual sense, the ineffable theurgic power (*arrhetos dunamis*) cannot be irrational (*alogos*), as G. Shaw maintains.[29] A. H. Armstrong is correct in observing that a word which recurs constantly when Iamblichus is speaking of the gods and sacred rites is *huperphues*, "supernatural", understood in a fairly strict theological sense.[30] This supernaturalism of Iamblichus sets the divine in a transcendent realm which is normally inaccessible and can be reached only through God's self-revelation and hieratic practices. This is the very reason why theurgy should be exempt from philosophical criticism and the opinions of mortals. It is not an irrational (*alogos*) power that generated *logos*, but rather that which is *huperousios*, "above being". Therefore the Pythagorean dealing with an irrational diagonal of a square (which has an irrational value and cannot be defined arithmetically, but may be performed geometrically, thereby turning the irrational into rational) is only using a symbolic demonstration at the level of mathematical realities, which are themselves reflections in the descending series of *peras* and *apeiria*. Arguing that noetic theurgies were mathematical rituals, G. Shaw defends the confluence of mathematics and theurgy:

"Like the irrational diagonal, the ineffable power of the gods was *alogos* with respect to discrete (arithmetic) reasoning yet became the source for a *logos* revealed in embodied (geometric) action".[31]

The profound analysis exercised by G. Shaw convinces us that only flowing into apeiron the theurgist remains *peras*: he embraces the Unlimited in his descent by maintaining the role of the Limit, because only by measuring himself into matter (since the Demiurge is "always doing geometry" and his instruments of "self-disclosure" are theurgists themselves and, in a lesser degree, all *bau* which descend) can one participate directly in the immaterial Forms.[32]

Through the *sunthema* of the sun, a symbol of noetic fire, one may reach the hidden sun, passing through the straight gate, door, mouth, "the eye of the needle", "the midst of the sun" which is Death. Because the sun is Death, "his offspring here below are mortal, but the Devas are beyond and therefore undying" (*Shatapatha Brahmana* VI.3.3.7).

We could agree with G. Shaw who argues that, for Iamblichus, an escape from the cosmos "apart from a more causal and responsible involvement in it" is not only undesirable but impossible,[33] only if the term "cosmos" would mean, first of all, an intelligible and henadic realm of the gods, the archetypal support of existence, symbolized by a lotus flower from which Ra-child (or Agni) himself is born. The descending entities come forth from the rays and return back by means of the rays. In the *Pyramid Texts*, the Egyptian priest admonishes the pharaoh (the prototype of all theurgists and initiates) as follows:

"Provide yourself with the Great of Magic (or Demiurgic-and-Theurgic Ability, *Heka*)... Cast off your impurity for Atum in On (Heliopolis) and go down with him; assign the needs of the Lower Sky and succeed to the thrones of the Abyss (*Niau*, or *Nu*)... Go up, open your ways by means of the bones of Shu, the embrace of your mother Nut will enfold you...

Ascend and descend; descend with Ra, sink into darkness with *Ndi*.
Ascend and descend; ascend with Ra, rise with the Great Float-user.

Ascend and descend; descend with Nephtys, sink into darkness with the Night-barque.

Ascend and descend; ascend with Isis, rise with the Day-barque…

O Atum, raise this pharaoh up to you, enclose him within your embrace, for he is your son of your body for ever" (*PT* 222).

"Raise yourself… in your name of God, come into being, an Atum to every god" (*PT* 215).

As R. O. Faulkner remarks, the pharaoh assumes the rank of the supreme deity and is not like Atum but is Atum.[34] If God is One and Many, One and All (*hen kai pan*), being both 1) Hidden of Name (*Amun-ren-f*), with whom "there was no other god", and 2) *enneamorphos,* the one with nine forms. His seven heads (or seven *bau*) mean the divine immanence in the "million" (*heh*) of beings, entities, and things, as the Ramesside theology fairly attested. Therefore one cannot "escape" from the monistic "cosmos", equal to Reality itself, simply because, ultimately, only the supreme God exists – only the Parmenidean Being is real. By His magic powers, the One proceeds in a plurality of aspects, like the distributed parts of sacrifice. Nothing of "us" remains when we realize ourselves as "modalities" of the single ineffable Self and when we understand our powers as the "names" of Amun's activities.

6. Divine Triads in Egyptian and Neoplatonic Thought

According to Proclus, the "divine" (*theios*) Iamblichus praises numbers as containing various remarkable properties and regards them as "symbols of divine and esoteric things" (*tauta de sumbola theion esti kai aporrheton pragmaton: In Tim.* II.215.5). He describes the Monad as the cause of Sameness and Unity, the Dyad as the organiser of Procession and Division, the Triad as the leader of Return for what has gone forth, the Tetrad as the true embracer of all harmony and *logoi,* the Ennead as the creator of true perfection and similarity (*teleioseos alethines kai homoiotetos poietiken*). The Ogdoad is called the cause of Procession to all points and the Heptakaieikosad the force stimulating Return even of the lowest elements of the cosmos and so on.

J. Dillon explains this passage as the earliest definite reference where two triadic processes of *mone-proodos-epistrophe* are revealed in a scheme based on the seven numbers of the Soul: the first triad for the noetic realm, the second for the world of becoming, with the Tetrad serving as the mediating point (like the universal Soul) between the first diacosm (*protos diakosmos*) and the second diacosm (*deuteros diakosmos*).[35]

The triadic arrangements of metaphysical entities are attested in the earliest Egyptian theological schemes. On the first Dynasty ivory comb from Abydos, Horus is already portrayed in three hypostases: 1) as a falcon on the palace facade (*serekh*); 2) as an image of outstretched wings which curve towards the royal *uas* sceptres at each side, 3) as a falcon sailing in a barque across the sky.

For the Egyptians, the plurality of the noetic deities can be reduced to a triad. The transcendent unity of any *neter* unfolds in the realm of manifestation as a trinity. The ineffable essence unfolds in the immanent dimension by the three constituent elements, namely, 1) the *ba,* 2) image, and 3) body of the god, thereby producing the three-tiered arrangement of the created cosmos.

According to J. Assmann, all these theological forms of divinity are constituents of a higher unity and develop outward from the articulated whole like hypotactic series: 1) *ba*, image, body; 2) sun, cult statue, name; 3) heaven, earth, netherworld; 4) light, air, water; 5) Amun, Ra, Ptah.[36] The three divine hypostases (Amun, Ra, Ptah) are represented respectively by the name, the archetypal cosmic image and the cultic body (statue).

The transcendent pre-existence (Amun), the cause of the noetic sun (Ra), and the primeval mound (Ptah-Tatenen) may be compared to the Neoplatonic triple principle which explains and justifies the unfolding of the whole of reality. Plotinus maintained that at every level of reality the work of generating (*poiesis*) results from the contemplation (*theoria*) of higher reality; therefore the sensible world is a consequence of the noetic world in the same way that light is reflected from a source of light. Accordingly, Plotinus interpreted Hesiod's three gods (Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus) as equivalent to the three metaphysical principles, namely, the One, Intellect, and Soul.[37]

The threefold conception of Amun-Ra dominated Egyptian theology from the reign of Hatshepsut. As Alison Roberts pointed out, the three dimensions of divine existence (depicted as the hidden primordial mystery, the middle sphere of noetic life, and the realm of cultic image), corresponding exactly to "three worlds" in the later Hermetic tradition, are related to the three ascending terraces of Queen Hatshepsut's temple, the Holiest of the Holy (*Djeser-djeseru*), located beneath the cliffs of Deir al-Bahri.[38]

Even Akhenaten, before he turned to sheer iconoclasm and abandoned the link with tradition, defined his sole divinity as

Ra-Harakhti, i.e., Ra-Horus-of-the-Horizon (name);

Shu (emanation of the sunlight, depicted by arms holding *ankh* hieroglyphs raying down from the sun);

The celestial orb of the sun named Aten (image).[39]

Here an image sphere is reduced to Aten, the visible orb, instead of being represented by the cultic statues of the gods, or by the body of Ptah.

However, even in Akhenaten's case, being an image (*tut*) entails being distinguished from that which is an archetype. Though characterized by likeness and similarity, an image is inferior to an archetype and depends on it. An image is continuously attached to the generating hypostasis which sustains an image in its existence, just like the mirror image lasts as long as the object remains in front of the mirror (the word *ankh* means both life, breath of life, and mirror).

The rays which radiate from the sun-like *Nous* (or the Sun's Eye, the uraeus-serpent, whose all-seeing celestial gaze looks down on a radiant world), containing in archetype all of the kinds of things, are life-giving, and are therefore frequently depicted with *ankh* signs at their end.

The pharaoh's face (an image) is like the divine face of Ra (his immediate noetic archetype), and his accession to the throne imitates the sunrise when Ra "appears in glory", coming forth from the fiery furnace of Nut. The Sun god (*Nous*) appears renewed through the "golden" Hathor, the integral and whole *Wedjat* Eye, the Flame of Gold, "whose head is black". Her rituals of transformation and rebirth, performed by the archetypal child of Gold, Ihy, shaking a *naos* sistrum of Hathor, serve for theurgic ascent. The Hathorian musicians and dancers imitate the rhythms of cosmogony.

The concept of the Eye is crucial for ritual activities which carry the paradoxical idea of "sober drunkenness" represented by the union of Maat and Hathor, order and joyful ecstasy. A. Roberts argues that as the *Iret*-Eye, Hathor (Lady of the Sycamore Tree, Cow of Gold) also acts as the agent of Ra's activity. *Iret* means both "eye" and "doer"; therefore "the solar gaze becomes an activity as the eye – the instrument of divine energy and power – is projected out into the world".[40] In her form of Sekhmet she is the divine *shakti* of Ptah, thereby constituting the triad of Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertum (or Imhotep).

The ancient mimetic practices and sacred rites frequently follow the "dramatic" patterns of divine procession and return, dismembering and reintegration, as in the famous rope trick, described in *Jataka* IV.324, where the body of the performer, who climbs up by the thread, is cut to pieces and then put together and animated again. The thread symbolizes the sun ray and the spirit of breath.

In the archetypal realm, light, life, and sound constitute a sort of unity which is revealed by "name" (skr. *nama*, eg. *ren*), an equivalent of the noetic Form. The eternal name as noumenon is related to the sensible form (skr. *rupa,* eg. *d.t; irw*) as the omniform deity (*imago imaginans*) is related to all created things (*imago imaginata*). The name of a thing constitutes its reality derived from the noumenal content of *nous*, the divine consciousness which is always tantamount to Light, Life, and Sound. Therefore creation, accomplished by the *heka* power, is performed by utterance of names formulated in the heart. And ritual is inseparable from the dynamics of cosmogony based on divine paradigms, names, and powers.

While employing the Avicennian or Scholastic terminology of "substance" and "essence" (with the important reminder that these terms are synonymous inasmuch as they mean the archetypal content of things), F. Schuon distinguishes 1) the discontinuous and static relationship between the symbol and its principal archetype, the Idea, or Paradigm (*eidos*, viewed in its aspect of initial Norm) and 2) the continuous and dynamic relationship between the rite and its effect. The first relationship is described as "form-Essence", the second as "accident-Substance", maintaining that the accident is a "mode" of the Substance whereas the form is a "sign" of the Essence. Following this line of thought, F. Schuon argues that the divine symbol both "is God" and "is not God": 1) it is "image" because it is manifestation (*proodos* in the Neoplatonic sense) and not Principle (*mone*, unparticipated and transcendent point of any theophany), and 2) it is a participating irradiation and liberating sacrament because it is *Atma* in *Maya* (etymologically, the word *atman* perhaps is connected with breath, spiration, life, hence – spirit). Therefore F. Schuon says:

"Every sacred symbol is an 'enlightening form' that invites to a 'liberating rite'; the 'form' reveals the Essence to us, whereas the 'rite' leads back to the Substance; to the Substance we are, the only one that is. All this concerns, on the one hand sacred art, 'liturgy', and on the other hand the beauties of nature; it also concerns, with all the more reason, the symbolism of concepts and the rites of assimilation. Vision of the Essence is through the form, and return to the Substance by means of the rite. There is the visual symbol and the auditory symbol, then the acted symbol, all of which bring about the passage from the outward to the Inward, from the accident to the Substance, and thereby also the passage from the form to the Essence".[41]

The initial archetypal realm which activates and coordinates all liberating rites of *epistrophe* (return to the source) or *anagoge* (ascent, *mi'raj*) is equivalent to Being understood in the Neoplatonic sense. Like the primordial noetic triad of Heliopolitan cosmogony, the Procline intelligible Being and all its subsequent noetic manifestations have a definite triadic structure. Being is characterized by its unity, the power of this unity and the resulting mixture (*mikton*), the noetic existence itself (*autoousia*).

For Proclus, between two extremes there is a third term, an intermediary (*mesos*). The origin of the initial triad and the threefold structure of things lies, or rather stems, according to L. Siorvanes, from the fundamental polarity one and not-one.[42] However, the threefold structure expresses only a simple mixture; therefore in most other cases there are at least two intermediaries between two extremes, each similar to its proximate end.

This rule of "similarity" is valid for all forms and levels of being, but the unfolding trains of intermediaries partake of unity and their number cannot regress to infinity. Proclus argues that every mixture has three aspects: symmetry, truth, and beauty, correlated with 1) Being's unity (Ptah-Atum), 2) its power (Sekhmet, "the powerful one", depicted as lioness crowned with a cobra, the burning Eye of Ra) and 3) existence of Being itself (Nefertum, Lord of Perfumes and Beauty, coming forth from the primordial lotus, *seshen*).

Hence, the structure of unparticipated Being consists of Being-in-itself (*autoousia*), its power (*dunamis*), and its noetic intellect (*nous noetos*). The three aspects of unparticipated power, in its own respect, represent the transition from unity to plurality; therefore the "feminine" noetic existence of powers is regarded as Number-itself (*autoarithmos*). The nine members (the primordial Ennead) of Number constitute three triads.

The first one is measuring (*metretikos*) and consists of 1) the unity named "one" (*hen*) which is the cause of all unitary numbers (*heniaioi arithmoi*), 2) the power called "otherness" (*heterotes*) which is the cause of all productive numbers (*gennetikoi arithmoi*), 3) the participated characteristic of being (*on*) which is the cause of all real numbers (*ousiodeis arithmoi*). This triad is described as odd (*perissos*).

The second triad, described as even (*arthos*), is productive (*gennetikos*) and consists of 1) multiplying once, 2) multiplying twice, 3) multiplying thrice.

The third triad, described as all Number, is perfective (*teleiotikos*) and consists of 1) the odd multiplied by the odd, 2) the even multiplied by the even, 3) all combinations of odd and even.[43]

The power of Being is sometimes called Truth-itself (*autoaletheia*) or Wisdom-itself (*autosophia*). The intellect of Being, as the third member of mixture, is called beautiful (*kalos*) or Beauty-itself (*autokallos*). The characteristics of Being (for each of its three members) are taken from the six passages of Platonic dialogues – therefore the whole Procline list of six triads is presented by L. J. Rosan as follows. The being, power, and activity of the unparticipated Being are respectively called:

1) one being (*hen on*), wholeness (*holotes*), one and being (*hen kai on*) on the basis of Plato's *Parmenides* (142d);

2) being (*on*), whole (*holos*), the all (*pan*) on the basis of Plato's *Sophist* (244);

3) prior to eternity (*proaionios*), eternity (*aion*), eternal (*aionios*) on the basis of the *Timaeus* (37d);

4) one (*hen*), eternity (*aion*), the paradigm (*paradeigma*) on the basis of the *Timaeus* (38bc);

5) good (*agathos*), wise (*sophos*), beautiful (*kalos*) on the basis of the *Phaedrus* (246e);

6) symmetry (*summetria*), truth (*aletheia*), beauty (*kalos*) on the basis of the *Philebus* (65a).[44]

Most of these characteristics, however, are common to the Egyptian theologies, though they may constitute different triads and describe different gods or their manifestations.

7. Theurgic Assimilation to the Gods

The Neoplatonic cosmos, likened to the shrine (*agalma*) of the gods, is constituted by a series of oppositions – that of "form" and "matter", analogous to the monad and dyad in numbers – held in harmony by the "rhythmic weaving" of the Demiurge. This Craftsman is equivalent to Neith-Hathor in her aspect of Mehet-urt, the Divine Cow, meaning "great-full" in the sense of the inexhaustible plenitude and totality of the cosmos. Taking the role of the Creator, Neith, the Lady of Sais, is equated to Tanen, "two-thirds masculine and one-third feminine" (*Esna* V.100), who produces seven primordial divine names from his-her mouth.

This cosmos is symbolically embodied in the form of the Egyptian temple which is an "image of the celestial *akhet*", like the *akhet* (horizon, light-land) of the noetic realm.

Like the Egyptian temple rites and liturgies, the Neoplatonic theurgy consists in the soul's *mimesis* of the cosmogonical act. Since cosmogony itself is staged as the sacred rite of the Demiurge, the entire manifested world can serve as the temple and receptacle of the gods. The temple is not only "heaven on earth", a vessel of archetypal realities or the divine omnipresence in the world of phenomena, but at the same time "heaven and earth", Nut and Geb, actualized in symbolic forms of sacred architecture. Both the cosmos and the temple are regarded as a society of the *theoi sunnaoi*, the hierarchy of deities who were worshipped in the chapels surrounding the holy of holies.

According to Iamblichus, the soul's descent into the body is similar to an invitation to attend this cosmic liturgy: the theurgists, like the cultic statues of the gods, still living in their corporeal bodies can be united with the gods. Therefore the theurgical *praxis* is related to the descent of the divine into matter, the ritual collaboration with the gods in keeping the eternal cosmic liturgy, and the return to the solar barque of Ra. This "supernatural" mystery transcends all discursive reasoning and human understanding; therefore Iamblichus says:

"Intellectual understanding does not unite theurgists to the gods, for what would then prevent those who philosophize theoretically from having theurgic union with the gods? But this is not true; rather, it is the perfect accomplishment of ineffable acts, religiously performed and beyond all understanding (*he ton ergon arrheton kai huper pasan noesin*), and it is the power of ineffable symbols comprehended by the gods alone, that establishes theurgical union (*tois theois monon sumbolon aphthegkton dunamis epitithesi ten theourgiken henosin*). Thus we do not perform these acts intellectually; for then their efficacy would be intellectual and would depend on us, neither of which is true. In fact, these very synthemes (*ta sunthemata*), by themselves, perform their own work, without our thinking; and the ineffable power of the gods to whom these synthemes elevate us, recognizes by itself its own images (*eikonas*). It is not awakened to this by our thinking" (*De myster.*96.13-97.9).

Chaldean and Neoplatonic theurgy employed sensible things and natural elements that preserved pure traces of their noetic sources (for instance, Proclus regarded the intellect of Being as a tetrad, consisting of a monad and triad: the former representing the ideal cause of the element fire, the latter – of air, water, and earth). Therefore theurgic rites may be compared to tuning an instrument by putting it into resonance with the singing cosmos itself, already tuned by the Demiurge.[45]

In this sense, the task of the theurgist (as a servant of Hathor) is to remove *isefet*, disorder or imbalance, from the soul and cooperate with the healing, preserving, and elevating forces of truth (*maat*). This is accomplished through the energizing "work" of the *sunthemata* which functioned as receptacles for the divine *bau.*

Since earthly things cannot be deprived of participation in the divine, according to Iamblichus, those who practise the theurgic art (*he theourgike techne*) employ various synthemes, appropriate to different gods, and regard them as perfect receptacles, for example, stones, herbs, animals, aromatics, incantations, concoctions, and ineffable names of the gods. These sacred receptacles are even more numerous in Egyptian cultic practices and include coloured hieroglyphs, royal crowns, weapons, sceptres, thrones, alabaster bowls, baskets, Hathorian symbols such as *menat* and sistrum, papyrus and lotus flowers, reeds, fruits, scarabs, *wedjat* eye, *djed* pillar, jubilee pavilion (*sed*), shrines (such as *per-wer* and *per-nu*), trees (for example, sycamore, tamarisk, acacia, persea, etc.), mirrors, and so on.

The Egyptian texts always specify the kind of wood, metal, stone or perfume to be used for ritual purposes. The stone used for statues is called "sacred" (*djesert*). Aromatic substances and incense (*se-neter*) also function as divine *sunthemata* able to transform one into a divine state (*seneteri* meaning "to make divine").

The theurgic *apotheosis* means not only union with the gods, but also acquiring a transformed perception and a golden body of light, which imitates the solar orb (*aten*) and may be compared to a star. The goddess Nut (Heaven) says in the *Pyramid Texts:*

"Open up your place in the sky among the stars of the sky, for you are the Lone Star, the companion of Hu; look down upon Osiris when he governs the spirits, for you stand far off from him, you are not among them and you shall not be among them" (*PT* 245).

Another text assures the pharaoh that the doors of the starry sky are opened to him and he is one of the gods:

"Your scent is as their scent, your sweat is as the sweat of the Two Enneads, you appear in the royal hood, your hand grasps the sceptre, your fist grips on the mace…for you belong to the stars who surround Ra, who are before the Morning Star, you are born in your months as the moon... the Imperishable Stars follow you. Make yourself ready until Ra comes that you may be pure when you ascend to Ra..." (*PT* 412).

The theurgic immortalization of the soul, realized by the Neoplatonists in hieratic rites (also using immaterial symbols, geometric forms, numbers) and visualized as a sphere, the luminous "starry body" (since the vehicle of the soul in her circular movement is assimilated to *Nous*), is viewed as the recovery of one's original celestial state.

8. Deification through the Eye of Horus

The restoration of the soul's noetic perfection is symbolized by the restoration of the Eye. Therefore the Eye of Ra (from which humankind originated as an image) is one of the main theurgic paradigms and symbols, rich in metaphysical meaning. This is the reason why the pharaoh is "a screeching falcon who flies round the Eye of Horus" (*PT* 689). His own eyes appear as the Night-barque and the Day-barque of Ra (*PT* 670).

To provide one with the intact Eye of Horus, great of *heka*, means to divinize and resurrect him in the archetypal realm of Ra. The *Pyramid Texts* argue that the pharaoh (or the initiate) is censed with the Eye of Horus and thus made divine because of this Eye (*PT* 741) on which Horus has placed a golden collar (*PT* 742):

"Atum summons me to the sky, and I take the Eye of Horus to him. I am the son of Khnum... Long may this word be in your sight, O Ra; hear it... Open up my road..." (*PT* 524).

"The Eye of Horus gleams upon the wing of Thoth on the left-hand side of the ladder of the god. O men, a serpent is bound for the sky, but I am the Eye of Horus; this is obstructed in every place where it is, but I take my departure as the Eye of Horus. Desire that I should come among you, O my brethren the gods; rejoice at meeting me, O my brethren the gods, just as Horus rejoiced at meeting his Eye when his Eye was given to him in the presence of his father Geb" (*PT* 478).

The restoration of the Eye may be described in terms of purification, integration, and union. The restored noetic plenitude is a solar "rebirth" in the realm of *akhu*, therefore Iamblichus regards catharsis as a process which integrates the multiplicity into its intelligible unity and consists of 1) withdrawal (*aphairesis*) from alien things, 2) restoration of one's own essence (*apodosis tes oikeias ousias*), 3) perfection (*teleiotes*), 4) fullness (*apoplerosis*); 5) independence (*autarkeia*) from passion, 6) ascent to the creative cause (*anodos epi ten gennesamenen aitian*), 7) conjunction of parts with wholes (*sunaphe pros ta hola ton meron*), and 8) the contribution from wholes to the parts of power, life, and energeia (Stob. I.455.25-456.4). Thus the performance of theurgic ritual follows the rhythms of manifestation and reintegration, that is, the soul's path to demiurgy and its restoration after it has bathed again with Ra in the Lake of Rushes and uttered:

"See me, O Ra; recognize me, O Ra. I belong to those that know you, so know me" (*PT* 311).

Hence, by imitating the order of the gods, the soul restores its own Ra-nature by taking on "the shape of the god" (*to ton theon schema: De myster.*65.4).[46]

The whole Eye is anterior to its parts as the wholeness "prior to its parts" (*pro ton meron*), is "made up of parts" (*ex ton meron*), and represents the wholeness "within the part" (*en to merei*). Therefore the theurgic rite ought to embrace all orders of the gods in an appropriate way, thereby restoring the Eye as the corporeal, psychic, and noetic wholeness which leads to the ineffability of the One, the hidden Eye of the Serpent. When this Eye is opened at the dawn of noetic creation, the golden Scarab appears as Atum-Ra.

In the ascending rite, the soul is divinized because the telesiurgic ritual, performed by the initiate, tries to imitate divine "gestures" and celestial "dances". Accordingly, the soul itself becomes the *sunthema* which is filled with a divine presence. The role of matter consists in mirroring the condition of the soul: it reveals itself as purified and transformed when the soul realizes the overwhelming divine presence and is identified with the golden child Nefertum, seated in a lotus flower at the nostrils of Ra. As Iamblichus pointed out, mud symbolizes the material principle which functions as the foundation to nourish the divine lotus (*De myster.*250.13-252.11) Its circular throne can serve as a place where the soul is reborn, becoming like the solar Ra. The Horus-like pharaoh, being at once the chief mystagogue and the initiate, says:

"I appear as Nefertum, as the lotus-bloom which is at the nose of Ra" (*PT* 249).

"I have grasped your tail (or Ra in bull-shape) for myself, for I am a god and the son of god, I am a flower which has issued from the Nile, a golden flower which has issued from Iseion" (*PT* 334).

"I live on that whereon Shu lives, I eat of that whereof Tefnut eats" (*PT* 339).

"O Ra… I am you and you are I… if you shine in me, I will shine in you… for I am that Eye of yours which is on the horns of Hathor, which turns back the years from me; I spend the night and am conceived and born every day" (*PT* 405).

To be born every day (though a "day" also may be understood as a cycle of all manifestation until it is finally reabsorbed into the depths of Nun, as it is described in the *Book of Two Ways*) means to participate in demiurgic activity, being identical either to the Demiurge himself, or to the members of his solar barque. This claim is not the claim of a separate individual entity, but that of *Logos* (the Pharaoh as an archetype, the son of

Ra, *al-insan al-kamil* of the Sufis) who performs the cosmic rites as the sole Thaumaturgus.

9. Spiritual Teachers and Sacred Masters

The theurgic tradition is by no means restricted to its Neoplatonic branch, that which is largely based on the Chaldean oracles and the metaphysical exegesis of Plato, Orpheus, and Homer. Damascius, for instance, maintained that theurgic practices stem from Egyptian cultic stock.

In late antiquity, the forced decline of Egyptian temples under the Roman administration and Christian intolerance determined the general turning to oracle cults, prophetic figures, and local images that required a minimum of priestly services. The priests themselves shifted their realm of primary authority from temple liturgy to a role as esoteric philosophers and ritual experts. In a sense, they hellenized and, at the same time, continued the ancient tradition of *medu neter*, the writings of Thoth. The chains of initiation were maintained by various religious associations and mortuary guilds.

The lector priests often functioned as embalmers through the early Roman period; therefore temple traditions were maintained by *nekrotophoi*, "corpse-bearers". A mortuary guild in Kysis was still alive in early 4th century A.D., similar to a corporation of ironworkers who were making annual pilgrimages from Hermonthis to the Hatshepsut temple for a ritual banquet and sacrifice, or like associations (*sunodoi, klineis*) of priests devoted to the Blemmye god Mandulis, that were active in the 5th century A.D., during the lifetime of Proclus. However, under Christian dominion, the miniature models of temples and the hidden domestic altars of the priests replaced the actual temples. According to D. Frankfurter:

"These domestic priests' altars project a secrecy and concentric ritual holiness traditionally associated with established temples; but in their availability to the eyes of devotees and service for special rites the altars carry not only an exoteric familiarity but even a mark of status and authority for the hierophant who assembled the altar".[47]

The oracular function passed to seers and pious philosophers. They became prophetic figures and ritual experts who diminished the scope of sacred rites and shifted the emphasis from temple-based rituals to those concerned with amulets and domestic altars, blessings and curses, healing and protective spells, as well as secret initiations. During Roman times, Egypt already became internationally famous as the land of "magicians" and spiritual masters. It was regarded as "a landscape of gurus ready to teach and initiate Roman youths in all the esoteric mysteries and 'philosophies' they might yearn for or imagine", as D. Frankfurter pointed out.[48]

Owing to changing historical and social circumstances, a great number of Egyptian priests and mystagogues gained independence from particular temples and cultic service, "becoming a kind of extended fraternity of sacred masters under the aegis of Thoth".[49] They were the bearers of ritual *heka* power (*mageia*) and, in some cases, even joined the Neoplatonic circles of those who continued the Iamblichean and Procline chains of transmission in Egypt.

In Graeco-Egyptian tradition, the pharaoh Nechepso is regarded as a sage, stargazer, and designer of amulets (a kind of traditional *sunthemata*). Galen, discussing the properties of a green jasper stone, says:

"Some also set it in a ring and engrave on it the radiant serpent, just as King Nechepso prescribed in his fourteenth book" (*De simpl.* X.19).

The pharaoh Nechepso is imagined as a recipient of revelatory epistles from the sage and priest Petosiris. Firmicus Maternus claims transcribing "all that Hermes and Anubis have revealed to Asclepius, all that Petosiris and Nechepso have set out in detail, all that Abraham, Orpheus and Kritodemus have written" (*Math.* IV). The text, dated A.D.137-138, speaks of the revelatory chains as follows:

"After examination of many books as they have been handed down to us from ancient wise men, that is, the Chaldeans, and Petosiris, and, especially, king Necheus (Nechepso), just as they themselves consulted with our Lord Hermes and Asclepius, that is, Imouthes, son of Hephaistos" (*Pap. Salt/Louvre* 2342).

Nechepso is credited with knowledge of the affinities of stones and plants with the stars: during a nocturnal *mi'raj*, or *anabasis eis ouranou*, he had ascended through the air (*pros aera*) and heard a heavenly voice (*Nechepsonis et Petosiridis*, fr.1) – a revelatory discourse on the music of the spheres, as W. Burkert maintains.[50] Petosiris also had journeyed with gods and angels, and a letter from Nephotis to Pharaoh Psammetichus even offers a theurgic procedure for self-divinization by uniting the initiate with the sun (*Pap. Graecae Magicae* IV.155-285). The so-called *Mithras Liturgy* (thus incorrectly labelled by Albrecht Dieterich) deals with the ritual and experience of immortalization (*apathanatismos*), including descriptions of breathing techniques, amulets and ineffable words of power (*hekau*). While depicting a liturgical mystery for the ascent of the soul through seven stages, the text instructs:

"Draw in breath from the rays, drawing up three times as much as you can, and you will see yourself being lifted up and ascending to the height, so that you seem to be in midair. …you will see all immortal things…. will see the divine order of the skies: the presiding gods rising into heaven, courses of the visible gods will appear through the disk of god, my father… you will see many five-pronged stars coming forth from the disk… And when the disk is open, you will see the fireless circle, and the fiery doors shut tight. At once close your eyes and recite the following prayer… invoke the immortal names… Then open your eyes, and you will see the doors open and the world of the gods which is within the doors… the rays will turn toward you; look at the centre of them… you will see a youthful God, beautiful in appearance, with fiery hair, and in a white tunic and a scarlet cloak, and wearing a fiery crown… Helios, the Lord of heaven and earth, God of Gods…" (*Mithras Liturgy* 540-640).[51]

10. Radiant Power of Names and Flight to the Throne

The autobiography of Thessalos (2nd century A.D.), couched in the form of a letter to a king from the magician, describes the communication with the deity in a place, specially prepared by the Theban priest in Upper Egypt. Thessalos asks to see Asclepius (Imhotep) "alone, face to face", sitting on a chair opposite a throne on which the deity, invoked with "powerful mysterious words", manifests itself. According to J. Z. Smith, the formula *monos pros monon* is related to the older formula *monos mono*, meaning "private" or "secret".[52]

An experience of divine epiphany initially is both an outer and inner experience in the holy of holies of the Egyptian temple, standing before the statue of the deity or contemplating the first rays of the rising sun. Therefore the Plotinian ascent, described as "the flight of the alone to the alone" (*phuge monon pros monon: Enn.* IV.9.11), is originally a symbolic and initiatory path through the temple to the hidden chamber where the throne of the deity stands.

The journey through the Netherworld (Duat, the temple of Osiris and the body of Nut) is modelled on the same pattern which may also be depicted as a vertical ascent to the realm of Ra in order to see the divine face and be united with it. The king ascends to Ra's seat because his "face is that of falcons", and the "face of the god is open" to him, where he sits on the great throne beside the god (*PT* 271).

Though arranged and depicted in accord with the established genre of mythical paradigms and sacramental formalism, this ascent (*anodos*) is not an event of physical displacement and chronology, but rather elevation through the symbols (like the reading of the ontological text in reverse, moving from one point of identity to another, and finally reaching the innermost noetic centre), thereby summarizing the revealed divine presence and realizing essential union with the Principle. The Egyptian hieratic ascent, whose uplifting force is tied to the intelligible interpretation of symbols (by elevating to noetic truth: *De Myster.*250.13-18), is not accomplished simply by rituals or sacred symbols themselves, but also by the accompanying knowledge, understanding, and illumination.

The ascent (*anagoge*) and reunification with or return to the divine is a kind of "hermeneutical clarification" or "presentation" of the "radiant power" (*akhu*) of words and images in the realm of semiotics and iconography. "I ascend to the sky among the gods, I bring and repeat the word of the gods", says the "deceased" (hierophant) who "knows the names" and is initiated into the sacramental meaning and radiant power of divine speech. This radiant power, *akhu,* reveals the metaphysical sphere of meaning that is imposed on sensible reality in a manner that explains it and directs it towards the intelligible source. Likewise the Iamblichean *noera theoria*, the intellectul interpretation or the "more epoptic" (*epoptikoteron*) approach, consists in identifying the characteristics of being discrete or continuous as aspects of the power of the One, active at every level of reality. However, according to J. Assmann:

"Instead of supplying definitions, Egyptians would state names, that is, the sacred and secret names of things and actions that the priests had to know to exercise the radiant power of the words. A highly characteristic, and certainly early, form of handing down these names is the commentary ('this means'), as exemplified by the Ramesseum Papyrus, which records knowledge that unfolds on two levels: that of appearances and that of meanings, or names".[53]

The importance of god-given names which constitute manifested reality and may be related to the demiurgic Logos (Hu) is emphasized in Proclus' Commentary on the *Cratylus* of Plato. While launching into a discussion on the power of names, Proclus distinguishes two views prevalent among the ancients: 1) some take the view that the gods transcend all names which begin at the level of daimons; 2) others think that the names are only one type of *sunthemata* which the gods have sown at all levels of being. Since names are symbols correlated with noetic realities, there are correct names that constitute the dynamic meta-structure of reality (as a web of *agalmata phoneenta,* "vocal images" of the gods, i.e., the phonetic correlates of images which represent in words what the *sunthemata* sown by the gods represent in the cosmos) and through them one has access to the gods.

Like the Chaldeans, Indians, and Hellenes, the Egyptians have a revealed vocabulary suitable to the theurgic purpose of elevation. As J. Dillon explains, theurgy teaches us how to represent the structure of symbols and synthemes in the physical world by means of inarticulate utterances (*adiarthrotoi ekphoneseis*: *In Crat.* LXII. p.31,27 Pasquali).[54] Being a sort of *agalmata* (such as properly constructed and animated statues), the mantric strings of syllables and vowels (*asema onomata*) transmit divine power. However, they are surpassed by divine names proper which stem from the intelligible realm and are used to call upon the gods. Like the divine names employed in the Sufi *dhikr*, they function as a means of ascent and union.

For the Egyptians, the name (*ren*) represents an essential relationship between the name and the named. Therefore everything that can be extracted from the name reveals something about the essence of the named, and everything said about the archetypal structure, the essence of a god, of a human being or of any manifested thing, is contained in its name.

11. Theurgic Union with the Divine Principle

Unity within divine Intellect is derived from the One's presence which is ineffable and transcends the realm of "uttered" noetic gods. For this reason Plotinus thinks that union with the One (which is possible when the soul has already been "deconstructed" and assimilated with *Nous*, i.e., when the soul re-establishes its initial Ra-nature) cannot be achieved by ritual, though purification and dialectic will lead upwards, due to the providentially arranged structure of the cosmos allowing this possibility. But the supreme goal is "outside the control of even the noblest philosopher", as J. M. Rist pointed out.[55]

In this respect, one should remember that the Alexandrian Neoplatonist Hermeias (5th century A.D.) discussed the distinction between 1) *he endon telestike*, "internal telestic art", which makes our soul perfect and complete in all its powers, and 2) *he exo telestike*, "external telestic art", which helps to free our soul and body from troubling difficulties and furnishes us with a happy passage through life, clearly regarded as the process of purification (*katharmoi*) and rites (*teletai*) that set us among the gods (*In Phaedr.* 96.2-8; 97.23ff).

The external *telestike* is further described as *anthropike kai technike telestike*, "human and technical telestic", which depends on the skill of the priests and is used in the cult of statues (*peri tas therapeias ton agalmaton*), following the established law (*nomos*) of the city and native traditional customs. This *he technike telestike* and the related hieratic life provide assistance to pious citizens by means of sacrifices, prayers, incantations and rites, involving plants and stones (ibid.,99.14-19; 165.14-15).

Internal theurgy, or inspired telestic, makes the soul intellectually active according to all its powers which, ultimately, are divine powers and attributes. A. Sheppard tries to convince us that Proclus, following his master Syrianus, divided theurgy into three types:,the third kind of telestic (also described as *theia philosophia*, divine philosophy) serving to accomplish mystical union.[56]

Proclus indeed subdivides the "ritual" of return into stages: 1) just as by soul we attain likeness to Soul (the realm of Osiris and Nut), and 2) by heart-intellect to the noetic world (the realm of Ra and his Eye, Hathor), so 3) it is by "the flower of intellect" (*anthos nou*), by our *henosis* (unity), we attain union with the One or rather with the Father of the Intelligible Triad, if the supreme union with the One itself is reserved for "the flower of the whole soul". Proclus partly follows Porphyry who offered some kind of identification between 1) the *huparxis* in man and 2) the *huparxis* that is the One. But Proclus cannot accept that Porphyry's *huparxis* (called Father by the *Chaldean Oracles*) is the supreme Principle in the transcendent hierarchy.

The threefold division of theurgy and the designation of its lower ritualistic aspect as "merely skilful" is not correct, because every ritual has its inner dimension through which the human *huparxis* can be united with the divine *huparxis.* All *sunthemata,* notwithstanding the level of their ritual taxonomy, provide a direct access to the divine. Only human capacities differ; therefore each man attends to his sacrifice according to what he is and cannot surpass the proper measure.

In order to reach the One, the soul must be assimilated to the Whole (*pan*) by honouring all the gods, including the material ones, whose influence is universal and works on the principle of like to like (*di' homoioteta: De myster.*193.18-19). In monistic metaphysics, "materiality is created out of substantiality", as Iamblichus says, speaking about the Egyptian tradition (*paradosis*) from which Plato derived his doctrine of matter (Proclus *In Tim.*117d, I.386.8). Therefore matter serves as the index (*deigma*) of divine presence, or as the mirror that reflects the spiritual condition of the soul.

Proclus maintains that the telestic rites obliterate all stains produced by generation. This obliteration is accomplished through the "divine fire" (*dia tou theiou puros*), i.e., through the Flame of Gold, the Eye of Ra, the fiery Hathor-Sekhmet. Therefore Heracles, being purified through the telestic art, obtains a perfect restoration to the gods (*eis tous theous apokatastasios*). Accordingly, he serves as a model both for 1) philosophy and 2) theurgy, which is called *theia philosophia*, greater than all human virtue and knowledge.

Three ways of ascending to the divine are described by Proclus: 1) *erotike mania*, "erotic madness" – such as that which possessed Majnun and the Sufi martyr al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (A.D.858-922) – enables the ascent through love to divine beauty, 2) *theia philosophia* enables the ascent through truth to divine wisdom, and 3) *theourgike dunamis*, the grace-bringing power, enables the ascent through faith to divine goodness. A. Sheppard thinks that all three ways mean the same thing and refer to mystical union.[57]

In fact, the Egyptian formulation which affirms "One is All", implies that unity with the deity may be accomplished at any level of divine manifestation, thus paradoxically confirming the single Principle behind the millions of his faces, masks, and body-members, moving from multiplicity to the supreme and hidden Oneness, to the *deus absconditus* whose manifestations (*bau*), irradiations, names, symbols, images, receptacles, reflections, and shadows are all deities, souls, and things. The ascending hierophant may be identified with the different portions of ontological text, at every point of *anamnesis* revealing the particular divine *eidos*, peculiar to that level, and, by recognizing and naming every cosmogonical entity, to "be united with the gods in On" (*PT* 617). Through Horus the Uniter he realizes himself as the essence of all the gods and says:

"I am the primeval hill of the land in the midst of the water" (*PT* 484).

When the ascending pharaoh presents himself to Shu as the son of Atum, Shu confirms this claim and says:

"You are the eldest son of Atum, his first-born; Atum has spat you out from his mouth in your name of Shu" (*PT* 660).

Who then is Shu? And does the "soul" still remain the same ascending soul, when it returns to the mouth of Atum "in his name of Shu"? Only the generic arrangement of ranks and the dynamic play of masks and functions are present. Finally, as it is attested in the *Book of Two Ways*, the ascending ba (such as the Sufi martyr al-Hallaj who proclaims the supreme unity, *tawhid*, by saying *ana'l-Haqq*, "I am God") may pronounce the theurgic statements of identity, for instance:

"I am *sahu* of Ra, the Lord of Maat… I am Ra" (*CT* 1034/5).

In this case, Ra himself confirms his own identity through the rite of *anamnesis*, performed by the soul which "disappears" as a separate entity and is assimilated into the "Great-name who made his light" (*CT* 1082/53). The "deceased" initiate, as a forever living spirit, is no longer in any sense "deceased" when Atum in him discovers himself as Atum and says:

"I am Atum" (*CT* 1063/34).

The mystical union (*henosis*) with the One is stated in such paradigmatic formulations as "I am Nun, Lord of Darkness" (*CT* 1132/2), or "I am [myself]" (*CT* 1142/15).

12. Intellect of the Father and His Cosmic Drama

Neoplatonic theurgy, itself being a hermeneutically refined version of ancient anagogic rites, is possible only in a kind of text-like symbolic "world" which is "full of gods" and is similar (*homoiotatos*) to the archetypal realm, the Essential Living Being (*autozoon*) of Platonists. The animated and visible universe is "animated" because it imitates the invisible completeness and brightness of the Essential Living Being. All living beings unitarily and generically are parts of this *autozoon* and they attain fulfilment under the Essential Living Being according to the multiplicities and henads contained in them.

Since the noetic *autozoon* encompasses all those genera that come after it (and all things proceed from the intelligible realm), it is regarded both as 1) a whole before its parts and as 2) a primary principle of causation which brings to completion all things from within itself. Therefore Iamblichus asks: How would any part of the All be completely devoid of God? And how would any place survive entirely unprotected by the superior ones? (Proclus *In Tim.* I.145.5). Damascius raises almost the same question:

"Are then all the elements which are in the universe also within us, and all that are in us also in the universe?" (*In Phileb.*130.63)

The proper answer may be that "all things are everywhere, but in different modes in different places" (*panta einai pantachou legontes, allos mentoi kai allos*: ibid.). According to Proclus, all the causes share in each other and are in each, therefore in a certain sense the Paradigm of the universe (*to paradeigma tou pantos*) is encompassed by the Demiurge (*In Tim.* I.336.16). In this respect, Iamblichus says:

"Real existence and the beginning of created things and the noetic paradigms of the cosmos (*ten ontos ousin kai ton gignomenon archen kai ta noeta tou kosmou*), which we term the noetic cosmos, and such causes as we declare to pre-exist all things in Nature, all these things the Demiurge-God whom we are now seeking gathers into one and holds within himself" (Procl. *In Tim.* I.307.14).

Like the Egyptian priests, the Neoplatonists discerned different levels of demiurgic activity presided over by different creators, for instance, 1) the transcendent Father (*ho pater ton demiourgon*), 2) the Heavenly Demiurge, 3) the sublunary, genesiurgic Demiurge. The sublunary Demiurge may be interpreted as Hephaistos (Ptah), or the whole triad may be identified with Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto respectively. Thus the first primeval creator (*protos ton demiourgon*) is distinguished from the middle or second creator (*ho mesos demiourgos*) and the third creator (*ho tritos demiourgos*), who co-operates with the creative activity of the second (Procl. *In Tim.* I.74.15-16).

Hermes is regarded as the angelic intellection (*angelike noesis*) of the Father. This *noesis*, equivalent to the *logos* of the Father, is "geometric" and, therefore, creates the basis of the three-dimensional world. The Hermaic *logos* is analogous to the script transmitted by Thoth. Since Ptah (sometimes viewed as the supreme Demiurge) is the god of hieroglyphs, who creates them by inventing the forms and names of everything, Thoth simply writes them down.. Therefore the world-creating words and hieroglyphs are viewed as "everything which Ptah has created and which Thoth has written down". The ontological structure of reality is hieroglyphic and readable. The writing practised by the priests only embodies what is already presented in the realm of noetic paradigms and implicit in the structure of manifestation. According to J. Assmann:[58]

"It is a kind of Platonism. Plato interprets the visible world as the infinite material reproduction of a finite set of immutable ideas. The Egyptians interpreted the visible world as a kind of infinitely ongoing production which very faithfully follows an original finite set of types or models. And this same set is also represented by the hieroglyphic system. The hieroglyphs reproduce the world of things, and the world of things can be viewed as a world/word of signs. To the hieroglyphic mind, things and signs are interchangeable. It was this way of world-making that made Egyptian wisdom so attractive to the Neoplatonists of Late Antiquity..."[58]

Iamblichus maintained (following Pythagoras in this respect) that the lines by which the gods proceed down are symbolized by Prometheus, equated to *pronoia* (providence). And the routes of their return upwards into the noetic realm are symbolized by Epimetheus, whose name means *epistrophe eis to noeton*, "reversion to the intelligible sphere" (Damascius *In Phileb.*57.29).

Proclus provides a different interpretation: to him Prometheus represents the Circle of the Same within us, and Epimetheus the irrational nature which bounds it and prevents us from making the spiritual ascent (*In Tim.*346.12ff). In both cases, the double circle of manifestation and reintegration constitutes the ontological, mythological, and semantic frame for the ritual activities which follow the rhythms of the cosmos.

Both the descent and ascent of the soul is a rite, like the daily solar circuit of Ra and the circular movement of the Year. Since human beings imitate archetypal patterns, translated into the language of sacred calendar and mythology, their life is ordered, ritualized, and dramatized by demiurgic forces turned into cultural forms. Only those events and actions that confirm the regular structure of the Whole and imitate the life of the gods are considered to be real, important, and worthy of mention, at least until the New Kingdom when the theology of divine will has emerged. But even in the realm of personal devotion, only typical, regular and predictable patterns, integrated into the ritual fabric of cosmic liturgy, are valued, not some contingent, accidental, and deviant characteristics.

A daily drama of the cosmic ritual, performed by the circuit of Ra, stands as the symbolic paradigm for all aspects and levels of the ongoing life-process, covering not only the pursuits of royal politics, economics, and jurisprudence, but also various types of esoteric initiations and "philosophies". The mystery of solar rebirth and the circuit of Ra are models for the pious life on earth and for spiritual initiation, aimed at the alchemical transformation of the soul, in the realm of Osiris.

The "solar discourse" provided a kind of sacramental interpretation, or metaphysical hermeneutics, able to translate invisible paradigms – presented in visible icons of the sun's circuit – into a design for human living and for departing to the beautiful West. Thus the circuit of the sun is stretched out as the sacred text and constitutes a series of symbolic pictures that function on different levels of interpretation, both transcendent and immanent. In its mythological aspect of cosmic and social exegesis, the circuit affirms order over chaos, intellect over irrational passion, Ra over the snake Apep, thereby modelling the governmental and political dimension of sacred kingship, itself regarded as a multi-structured soteriological ship, whose light-bearing helmsman (pharaoh) triumphs over darkness and is united with his Father and all the gods.

Cosmic life at all levels reflects the conflict of Horus and Seth, resolved into transcendent union by the wisdom of Thoth. By realizing the permanent threat of disorder (*isefet*), the Egyptians tried to prevent any deviation and improvisation, while maintaining that an accurate ritual repetition can counter decline and decay, thus safeguarding links with the noetic realm and sustaining cosmic life itself. Rites and recitations were based on an exact mimesis of divine archetypes, projected into the cosmic process of cyclical recurrence. Their esoteric function consisted in elevating to first principles, leading from multiplicity to unity.

Finally, supreme unity transcends Eternal Recurrence (*neheh*) kept in motion by the macrocosmic rites of the Demiurge, imitated by the pharaoh-priest in the sphere of cult. Since the noetic realm, ultimately, may be reduced to the sole divine Thaumaturgus, both opinions, namely, 1) that souls which have attained perfection (*teleos apokathistamena*) in the noetic realm are exempt from descent and 2) that they must descend again, at least as some kind of avataras, are paradoxically both true at the same time.

However, notwithstanding monistic unity or strictly metaphysical oneness, the cosmos partakes of conflict by reason of the variety of its powers. Therefore the pharaoh and every priest, or administrator, who perform the *maat*-sustaining and *akh*-revealing rites, are viewed as warriors involved in the cosmic game. According to Proclus, paraphrasing Iamblichus:

"For since all things derive both from the One and from the Dyad after the One and are united in a way with each other, and have been allotted an antithetical nature, so also in the major categories of Being there is a certain antithesis of the Same as against the Other, and of Motion as opposed to Rest, and since all things that are in the cosmos partake of these classes, it would indeed be suitable to consider the conflict as extending through all things" (*In Tim.* I.78.6ff).

However, as A. K. Coomaraswamy pointed out, the Devas and Asuras, powers of Light and Darkness, although distinct and opposite in operation, are in essence consubstantial: their distinction is a matter of orientation and transformation, but not of essence.[59] The war waged between Ra and Apep, Horus and Seth, may be interpreted, following Iamblichus, as that faculty which utterly destroys the unordered and irregular and which promotes the wisdom of immaterial and transcendent intellection (Procl. *In Tim.* I.165.16). Therefore the warlike mode of life presided over by Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is "philosophical" in the sense of the great *jihad – al-jihad al-akbar* of the Sufis.

The hierarchy of divine forces constitutes a single theophany, though differentiated into levels and classes, or rather "body-members" of the cosmic state. Therefore both Porphyry and Iamblichus tell us of cosmic priests, shepherds, hunters, farmers, and warriors. According to Proclus:

"The philosopher Porphyry lays down as follows: the priests are analogous to the archangels in heaven turned towards the gods of whom they are the messengers, and the warlike class is analogous to the daimons that descend into bodies, and the shepherds, again to those who are appointed over the herds of animals, whom they declare in secret teachings (*di'aporrheton*), to be souls who have failed of human intelligence… and hunters are analogous to those who hunt down souls and enclose them in bodies… and the farmers are those given charge over the crops" (*In Tim.* I.152.12ff).

Iamblichus criticizes the theories of Porphyry as "being neither good Platonism, nor true" (*oute Platonikos oute alethos*). As it is asserted by Proclus:

"Having made these criticisms, he (Iamblichus) establishes the priests as analogous through their similarity to all the secondary essences and powers, such as honour and serve the causes prior to themselves, and the shepherds to all those (beings) in the cosmos that have been allotted dominion over that life which inclines towards the body and over the irrational powers, and which arrange these in order, and the hunters to the general powers, which order the secondary powers by means of their search for Being, and the farmers to those who bring about the efficacy of those seeds which are borne down from heaven to earth, and the warriors to those who overthrow all that is godless, and make the divine to triumph" (*In Tim.* I.152.28).

13. Elevating Powers in the Pharaonic State-Body

The multi-dimensional cosmos, like the gigantic theatre of descent and ascent, of the eternal "divine comedy", may be crossed through and deconstructed by employing instruments provided by the Demiurge himself who bestows true love, that is, love of wisdom, to men and guides them by awakening the epistrophic forces that perform purifications, initiations, and telestic operations. Sacrifices and prayers are part of the way towards luminous self-knowledge. Therefore Iamblichus distinguishes three classes of prayer, in ascending order of perfection.[60]

The first type is described as knowledge of all divine orders (*gnosis ton theon taxeon pason*) and concerns the approach (*sunagogos*) to the divine realm. The suppliant must know all these orders and their specific attributes, i.e., must have a map, like the Egyptian initiate, before entering "the hidden place", Amentet. The Egyptian map-making tradition is concerned with the archetypal range of reality and possible states of the soul (*ba*) through its Otherworldly travel when each psychic or spiritual state is experienced as an externalized environment.

The second type of prayer links us with the divine by sympathetic association, or similarity (*homoiosis pros to theion*) in matters of purity, education (*paideia*, which provides knowledge of how the right prayers are to be addressed to the right deities), and rank (*taxis*). In this case the gods send their gifts even before our requests are expressed. The efficacy of prayer is based on the teaching that all things proceed from the gods and remain in them at the same time. By means of ineffable symbols (*sumbola arrheta*) the grace of the gods is actualized. As all things, which belong to various chains (*seirai*) of gods, experience manifestation, coming forth from initial principles, they also experience return (*epistrophe*), and to this *epistrophe* much is contributed by prayer.[61]

The third and highest type of prayer unites the immanent divine element (*to theion*) in us with divinity itself, and is described as *he arrhetos henosis*, unity beyond expression, establishing all power in the gods and completely integrating the soul in them by performance of the proper ritual acts (*hagisteia*). However, Iamblichus emphasizes that "it is impossible to participate individually in the universal orders of existence (*ton koinon taxeoon*), but only in communion with the divine choir of those who, with intellects united (*homonoetikos*), experience a common uplift (*anagomenon*)." (Damascius *In Phileb.* 227.107).

In this respect, one should remember that any individualism and subjective personalism in the modern sense is excluded from Egyptian mystical life. The theurgic ascent is like an ecpyrosis which accomplishes the destruction of the "man" within us (*ton en hemin anthropon*). The soul is to be gradually transformed and assimilated to the universal hypostasis in order to participate in the eternal *epistrophe* and self-consciousness of the Intellect (i.e., of Ra himself). Nothing remains, except the perennial cosmogonical schema or the radiant noetic network of solar *bau* where any trace of separateness and human individuality is annihilated.

Plotinus regards different souls as different levels of consciousness. He distinguishes the shade of Heracles in Hades (who remembers all that he did in his life, since the mortal life belonged to the shade) from Heracles himself, assimilated with the gods:

"The higher soul ought to be happy to forget what it has received from the worse soul… The more it presses on towards the heights, the more it will forget, unless perhaps all its life, even here below, has been such that its memories are only of higher things; since here below too it is best to be detached from human concerns, and so necessarily from human memories" (*Enn.* IV.3.32).

While being assimilated to Ra, the soul embraces everything that exists, but, in fact, this is the unitary affirmation of Atum-Ra himself, of Being *par excellence*, not of certain particular and eventually "deconstructed" fragments of existence. Therefore, in the *Pyramid Texts*, only the pharaoh ascends to heaven and is united with first principles, because he, as the son of Ra, represents the whole creation and the whole of humanity, standing at its apex. In this sense, he is a prototype of the Christian *Logos:* nobody can ascend to the Father except through this pharaonic *Logos* and as this *Logos.* For this reason, the pharaoh is everybody's *ka*, everybody's divine Self and driving force.

The heart-guided individual is first integrated into the pharaonic state-body, as a participating member of this *imago dei*, of the Idea, that is, the Horus-king, who alone ascends to the supreme archetype. The State and immortality are inseparable (and this is, perhaps, the hidden meaning of Plato's *politeia*); therefore the pharaoh, as the perfect cosmic *Anthropos* and the lord of burial presides over the means of salvation – the theurgy of stone and the way leading to an *akhet,* the threshold of Light. The Middle Kingdom texts emphasize the heart-intellect and the royal Self, for which all members of the state (itself viewed as the dismembered and reunited body of Osiris) must exchange their individual selves:

"Venerate the pharaoh in the inside of your bodies.
Pledge allegiance to His Majesty in your hearts.
He is Sia, who is in the hearts,
His eyes, they pierce every body.
He is Ra, thanks to whose beams, one sees,
An illuminator of the Two Lands, more than the sun…
The pharaoh is Ka, Hu is his mouth,
All things that exist are brought forth by him.
Bastet he is, who protects the Two Lands…
Sekhmet he is to him who violates his commandment".[62]

14. The Perfect Man who Slew the Lords

According to the *sutratman* doctrine, presented in Indian scriptures, all things are connected with the sun which is *atman* (spirit, intelligence, Atum-Ra) of all that is in motion or at rest. The sun strings all manifested entities and levels of being to himself on a thread (*sutre samavayate*), and this thread is the same as the Gale (*vayu, pneuma,* the breath of Shu). *Brhdaranyaka Upanishad* declares:

"He who knows that thread and the Inward Ruler (*antaryaminam iti*), knows the Brahman, knows the worlds, knows the Devas, knows the Vedas, knows himself, knows all…" (*BU* III.7.1-2).

The soul of the sacrificer itself is food of the gods, because the sacrifice (death and transformation) defines the way by which the initiate can ascend and enter the sun, thereby crossing over from mortality to immortality. Therefore the famous Egyptian "cannibal hymn" (*PT* 273-274), so named by 19th century puritans and positivists, who were devoid of any noetic insight or understanding of symbols, should be interpreted in the sacramental and theurgic sense, bearing in mind the real meaning of "food" in traditional ontologies, gnoseologies, and cultic practices. The hieratic knowledge is assimilated by "eating" and "drinking" it (sometimes in quite literal sense); therefore the process of eating represents transformation and unification: one's belly, full of "magic" and knowledge, simply means the hidden inner dimension.

In the *Pyramid Texts*, the ascending pharaoh appears as a possessor of offerings, as the universal Sacrificer, who "eats men and lives on the gods". Being like his Father Atum, who begot him, the pharaoh is the eternal *ba* "in company with Him whose name is hidden". Thus the king, in his role of *pantheos*, is united with all manifested beings:

"As a god who lives on his fathers
And feeds on his mothers;
The pharaoh is a master of wisdom
Whose mother knows not his name" (*PT* 273).

He is explicitly described as an *imago dei*: "a sacred image, the most sacred of the sacred images of the Great One", older than the oldest whom thousands serve. By swallowing all entities the king affirms himself as immanent possessor of all divine names and attributes, including their cosmic manifestations. Therefore the text says that he has swallowed the intelligence of every god; thereby his lifetime is eternity.

One could easily render this conception into Sufi terms and say that the pharaoh represents the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) whose eternal essence is the Muhammadan Reality (*haqiqa muhammadiyya*), or the Muhammadan Light (*nur muhammadi*), created out of God's own Light. All living things derive life from him and all desiring souls are subject to his will, since the Perfect Man, also known as the Great Elixir, the Cosmos Reflecting Mirror, Guide, the Mighty Opium, is a manifestation of the archetypal Muhammadan Reality. This quality may be shared by many legendary prophets, sages, and avataras. According to the Central Asian Sufi 'Aziz ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi (13th century A.D.):

"This Perfect Man is always in this world and there is only one Perfect Man. This is because all creatures are like one person and the Perfect Man is the heart of that person and creatures cannot exist without a heart. There is not more than one heart, so there is not more than one Perfect Man in this world. There are many wise men in this world, but there is only one heart. Other people are in the process of perfection, each one has its own perfection".

"There is no need for all humans to reach perfection. If all humans reached perfection, then the attributes, names and actions of this light would not be completely manifested, and the order of this world would not exist. It is necessary for each person to have a level and be the locus of manifestation of an attribute. Each person has the preparedness for a task in order that the attributes, names and actions of this light become completely manifested and so that the order of the world exists".[63]

Accordingly, the Pharaoh (likened to the Osirian *djed* pillar, *axis mundi*) is one of the distant metaphysical prototypes of the Hermetic and Sufi *Anthropos teleios*, God's caliph, who is established upon the Throne like Horus-Ra or Osiris-Ra. Nasafi continues:

"The alchemy that mankind performs is that he takes the soul of whatever he eats. He takes the select and quintessence of those things, that is, light is separated from darkness in such a way that light knows and sees itself as it is. This is not possible except in the Perfect Man… The Perfect Man completes this alchemy and completely separates light from darkness because light does not know or see itself in any other place and it sees and knows itself in the Perfect Man".[64]

The divinized pharaoh "lives on the being of every god… even of those who come with their bodies full of *heka* from the Island of Fire", i.e., from the highest noetic sphere. The king "feeds on the lungs of the Wise Ones, and is satisfied with living on hearts and their *heka*", thereby becoming the master of all demiurgic, theurgic, and magic powers. Hence, all creative *heka* potencies, all souls and intellects are in the belly of the pharaoh who assumes a role analogous to that of Shiva-destroyer able to break the backbones of the gods, to take their hearts and crowns:

"It is Khons who slew the lords.
It is Shezmu (the god of wine-press) who cuts
Them up for the pharaoh
And who cooks for him a portion of them on his evening stones.
It is the pharaoh who eats their *heka*
And gulps down their spirits" (*PT* 273-274).

By using seemingly cruel images (not unlike the theomachies of Homer, defended by Proclus as having a certain esoteric meaning, if understood *kata ten aporrheton theorian,* according to the secret doctrine), this archaic "Stone Age" discourse describes the metaphysics of Atum and of his most sacred image, as well as the theurgic mystery of *anagoge,* portrayed as a tremendous myth, ritual, and cosmic drama. As J. Z. Smith pointed out, the incongruity of myth is not an error, but the very source of its power and an essential part of initiatory scenarios.[65]

15. Theurgic Rites and Sacramental Theologies

This ritualized ascent represents not an individual case of subjective experience, but serves as a panentheistic model, or map, of reality, equated to the body of God. A Christian mystic of the Procline-Dionysian tradition essentially seeks the same sacred communion (*koinonia*) with

God, or the Cause of all, through participation in the sacraments of deification. The stylistic difference in rhetoric and theological details is of secondary importance: the uplifting may be accomplished by virtue of sacramental food, rites, and symbols; not only by symbols themselves, but also by their interpretation. Hence, the upward movement is the task of certain esoteric hermeneutics – directed by Thoth or the Holy Spirit – which leads through the sensible to the intelligible.

Iamblichus regarded theurgy as an essentially divine power which is manifest in certain traditional rites and sacrifices, including the Egyptian rituals, "since the Egyptians were the first to receive communication from the gods" (*De myster.*258.4-5). In order to accomplish the noetic *apotheosis* and *henosis* (union) with the One, all the energies engaged in the soul's descent had to be re-engaged, transformed and ritualized into the anagogic energies of the gods. If the king represents all creation and stands for all human souls it means that the entire material and noetic cosmos must be swallowed so as to affirm his initial status as the all-inclusive Principle.

While employing the term "theurgy" to describe various sacramental activities, one should remember that even for Iamblichus *theourgia* is only one of a number of synonymous words. As A. Louth pointed out, all of them have more or less the same meaning and may be simply translated as "theurgy".[66] Among these synonymously used words are, for example, *mustagogia, hiera hagisteia, hierourgia, threskeia, hieratike techne, theosophia, he theia episteme,* i.e., the terms related to an initiation into the mysteries, spiritual guidance, celebration, sacred skill, divine wisdom (theosophy) and knowledge.

In Egypt, killing was strictly a state monopoly – the punitive force (bau) is symbolized by the flames of uraeus. The pharaoh as the all-inclusive *ba*, responsible for *maat,* is also the earthly image of the Demiurge. The royal image in the form of *ba* returns to its archetype. This idea became universalized after the collapse of the Old Kingdom (2670-2150 B.C.), when the initiatory way and the concept of *ba* were individualized to such an extent that, in principle, every man, symbolically assuming the role of the pharaoh (*imago dei*, both Horus and Osiris), may traverse the threshold into Duat as a winged soul, to pass the test of his heart on the Great Scales and ascend to the noetic realm.

The noetic realm itself is viewed as the ancestral "office" charged with maintaining the archetypal course of Ra and exercising eternal "creation" through life-giving power. This power has its prolongation in the ruling king, the golden Horus, the chief priest of the temple cult. All his activities are aimed at ensuring the proper rhythms of existence continue at the level of images. If these images deviate from their solar archetypes, the disorder and evil designs of enemies destroy the right theurgic relationship between the mythologized state and the community of gods.

According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, "the Vedic and Christian Eucharist alike preserve the values of cannibalism".[67] He thinks that very little may be left of what we are accustomed to regard as spiritual values if all elements of prehistoric origin were to be substracted from the most intellectual forms of religious doctrine. This fact, however, does not mean that Iamblichus and other Neoplatonists were directly dependent on the already highly sophisticated *Pyramid Texts* or on some hypothetical rites of ascent (through the pillar of smoke, for instance) practised by Paleolithic man. The only thing we are sure about is that the theurgic synthesis (or rather re-adaptation of Egyptian, Chaldean, and Hellenic cult customs and metaphysical scenarios) accomplished by Iamblichus, who maintained the idea of continuous revelation, has relevance for the tradition of *philosophia perennis*. A. H. Armstrong says:

"I do not feel spiritually remote from Iamblichus when I light my candle at Chartres or Einsielden. This, combined, with an awareness that a good deal of what has to be said in criticism of theurgic theology can be applied to some utterances of Christian theologians, Protestant as well as Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, should safeguard us against any return to a patristic (that is to say sectarian and fanatical) judgement of theurgy".[68]

A. H. Armstrong has in mind the Christian attacks against "pagan" theurgies, while at the same time imitating them and adapting them for Christian mystical theologies, sacramental liturgies, and sacred arts. P. Athanassiadi goes even further and says:

"Iamblichus' natural environment is, of course, the mystical dimension of Islam, as it developed from discussion in Sufi circles. ... their belief in the essential unity of the cosmos and in inspired revelation, and their constant effort towards achieving reunion with God are eminently Iamblichean themes, often expounded or pursued through methods which could well be described as theurgical."[69]

The Athenian philosopher and theurgist Proclus, who "observed the Egyptian holy days more than the Egyptians themselves", according to Marinus (*Vita Procli* 19), belongs to the same category of sages. He believed that the true philosopher must be "the hierophant of the whole world in common" (*koine... tou holou kosmou hierophantes:* ibid.19).

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ANIMATION OF STATUES IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS AND NEOPLATONISM

1. Sacred Images and Idols

It has become habitual for students of Hellenic philosophy to ridicule the Neoplatonic *telestike* which sought to animate sacred images or to induce the presence of a god in an inanimate receptacle (*hupodoche*). The crusade against idolatry, recast in Biblical or positivist scientific language, is filtered through Reformation Protestant theology and idealized rationalism which found a new life in 18th century European Enlightenment. This zeal is directed not simply against supposed irrationalism and superstition (though such an impression is intentionally maintained, in spite of the fact that Protestant and other Western ideological beliefs, both religious and secular, may be regarded as equally fantastic), but against "Pagan" Neoplatonism in general and, especially, against the animation of images.

The classical example which is constantly provided even by those scholars who are otherwise quite sympathetic towards Neoplatonic metaphysics is that of Maximus, the spiritual master of Julianus. Similarly, just as Indian "idolatry" was treated as shameful by 19th century British educators, so Maximus is regarded with contempt because, according to Eunapius, he makes a statue of Hecate laugh and causes the torches in her hands to light up automatically (*Vita soph*.475).

For the later Hellenic Neoplatonists, divine images were not only symbols of the gods: they were filled with the divine presence. The ancient world is rich in testimonies about *statuas animatas sensu et spiritu plenas* (*Asclep*.24) – statues living and conscious, filled with the breath of life, which provide oracles and foretell the future, cause and cure disease, and do many other "mighty works". Such and similar results are achieved through sacred rites conducted in the temples, or by special inspirations, incubations, dreams, and visions. As the supreme God is the fashioner, begetter, irradiator, or imaginator, of the gods, so man (though indirectly) is the maker of the gods who dwell in temples, or rather of their material bodies, and, when they needed to be consecrated, sacralized, permeated by the divine and living Soul, or *pneuma,* and thus "animated" in the sacramental liturgical sense, found a way to enable theurgic communication with the divine.

The main argument against idolatry, raised by Jewish and Christian iconoclasts, consists in asserting that idols are mere works of human hands (*erga cheiron anthropon*). In no way can they be regarded as *theia erga*, divine works, based on the actions of the gods or their energies, irradiations and powers. Since theurgy intensifies the presence of the gods on earth, itself viewed as a god (i.e., a visible psycho-material manifestation of the Egyptian Geb), or a temple, mediated through sacred rites, symbols, images and hieroglyphs, any attack against the power of "idols" is an attack against theurgy. There is no spirit in them (*ouk estin pneuma en autois*), no vital principle, *pneuma*, Egyptian *ka*, or Hindu *prana*. For the radicalized Hebrew Prophets, only Israel is a "statue" of Yahwe, or rather the living substitute for the cultic statue, since Yahwe mysteriously dwells in the seed of his nation and its history. To put it into Egyptian terms, he is the Lord of *kau* (pl. of *ka*, vital spirit, double).

The classicists who deal with late Hellenic philosophy sometimes forget that Neoplatonic theurgy is in many respects a continuation, restoration, or learned imitation of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern rituals, liturgies and spiritual techniques, surely reinterpreted according to the prevailing philosophical discourse of the time. And more than that. It requires very little hermeneutical effort (as Western rationalists and puritans maintain) for theurgy to be deduced from selected texts of the "divine" Plato himself and to be safely based on Pythagorean and Orphic wisdom. In this respect, animation of statues is inseparable from the Platonic theory of Ideas, which itself is scarcely "Platonic" in its ultimate origin, but stems from Egyptian and Mesopotamian mythological patterns.

If regarded in its "universal" metaphysical sense, animation of statues is neither a magic show arranged to deceive naive believers and irritate clever naturalists, nor simply a branch of Mediterranean theurgy aimed at obtaining oracles and producing *telesmata* – enchanted images whose presence had certain miraculous powers. The theurgic art of animation is closely related to the central metaphysical problems of the ancients, namely, those regarding the relationship between the divine principle and its manifestations (creation as theophany or self-disclosure), between the noetic archetypes and their earthly images, form and matter, soul and body. Accordingly, it presupposes the divine names and powers which organize and govern the cosmos – the divine body turned into the state (*politeia*) and holy shrine of initiation. Thus, before actual research into the misty problems of Neoplatonic *telestike* is started, one ought to outline the scope of subjects to be investigated – some of them to be explored beyond the limits delineated by purely historical analysis and beyond certain restrictions established by the study of the available documents.

The first and simplest surmise, if not the self-evident premise based on an "ineffable intuition", would be a reasonable supposition that, despite all possible historical, mythological and cultic differences, there must be some common metaphysical ground, or at least certain similiarities, which connect the Neoplatonic art of animation with the analogous practices in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and India (especially with the manifold Tantric traditions, partly based on the ancient Dravidian and Mesopotamian substrate). Therefore the Neoplatonic *telestike* (be it genuinely Hellenic or Chaldean) cannot be fully understood and explained without constant references to the cosmological doctrines and rituals of all those "philo-iconic" traditions from pharaonic Egypt to contemporary India. This is not a bold assertion of their identity or insistence that their contents are in all respects "perennial" and therefore unable to change, but rather the conviction that similar problems suggest similar solutions.

Comprehensive investigation (which is not our present task, however) would include such different but related topics as the prevailing conceptions of life and death, cosmogonical principles and animating forces, as well as traditional theories of *anthropos* and his relationship with the divine realm both in various mythological systems and in ancient Hellenic philosophy which itself partly derives from the rational exegesis of myths and deconstruction of rituals.

In the societies practising traditional crafts and artistic initiations, different levels and aspects of reality may be described by using the rich vocabulary of sculpture. The cultic statue belongs to a broader category of sacred images. Not only the human body but the universe as a whole may be compared to a divine statue. The Platonic *kosmos noetos*, a reproduction of the intelligent living Animal, and the solar *Nous*, the Demiurge, are sometimes regarded as statues and exemplary images. For Iamblichus, the stellar manifestations of the gods are *agalmata* – true icons or statues of the divine "drawn out of uniform Forms and noetic Essences" (*De myster.*168.4-5) by the Demiurge. Thus, the cosmos as a whole (*to pan*) is an image, created and animated by the "sounding statues" (or "vocal images", *agalmata phoneenta:* Damascius *De Phileb.*24), by the cosmogonical sounds which are the *agalmata* of the gods, later imitated by theurgists in the path of ascent and animation of artifacts.

On the microcosmic level, the human being as an *imago dei*, or *simulacrum dei*, may be likened to the theurgic statue constructed by the rules of symbolic iconography, according to the proper "ontological genre". For example, the figure of ruler, who, in pharaonic Egypt, is Horus incarnated, a son of Ra, of the solar Demiurge, is a visible model and vital principle (*ka*) for the entire body-like state. His historical heirs and imitators are initiates of all sorts, *mustai, bakchoi*, magicians, poets, and philosophers who in one way or another represent the central cosmic axis, the Perfect Man of the later Gnostics and Sufis. Finally, every human being, regarded as a puppet of the gods, may restore the primordial splendour of his body (acting through the mask of some divine hero or through the maintained state of the virtuous servant, *doulos theou, therapeutes*) and reveal the ideal inner statue by "polishing the mirror of the heart" in the search for the animating water of life.

2. Vehicles of Divine Forces

Any statue serves as the vehicle of a certain essence, therefore it is a body. Now there are physical, psychic, pneumatic, ethereal, and noetic bodies, immaterial and material, constituted by different elements or their mixtures. On the way of descent and ascent, analogy and preparedness govern their trajectories of life. In the organized cosmos of theophanies, where ideas and images, archetypes and copies are arranged according to strict hierarchy and put in order, the difference between natural and artificial is almost indiscernable: everything, except the One, is in a sense both artificial and natural. Therefore the fabricated cult statues simply constitute one of the numerous ontological levels (each filled by their own "statues" – models and images), where the bonds between form and matter, archetype and icon are made visible and where the higher divine forces are at work. Thus, not only a king, ancestor, parent, beloved, and spiritual master can be regarded as the real or imagined statue prescribed for adoration and contemplation, but also the dead body itself may be turned into the archetypal mask, stellar body, statue-like mummy (*sah*) which represents the ideal golden body of Osiris, reconstructed by Anubis, the chief mystagogue in the alchemical rites of rebirth, and animated by the Eye of Horus.

As a means of communication with the beyond, divine images served in the economy of cultic offerings, thus keeping the cosmic rhythms, creating social integration, affording health, abundance, protection and granting oracles. The methods of divination themselves are aspects of theurgical techniques used to elevate and divinize the soul, therefore no wonder that in certain cases the telestic statues assist in the process of initiation, rebirth and union with the divine essence. Even the tomb or sarcophagus may be regarded as *soma* and the womb of the goddess. Likewise the human body is both an alchemical tomb and a temple where the golden statue is to be produced and revealed. Behind all the ideas of a forged immortal body of metal or gold there lies the metaphysical symbolism and conviction that incorruptible bodies of the gods were made of precious substances – perfumes, stones, and metals, especially gold (*neb*).

In the *Pyramid Texts*, the anagogic gods (those who function as elevating forces) and the ascending *ba* of the animated king (who is himself constantly equated with Osiris, Horus, Thoth and other divine hypostases) are indistinguishable from their immortal iconographic statues or holy images. Since "all processions and all conversions are accomplished because of likeness" (*dia ten tes homoiotetos aitian*), according to Proclus (*Plat. Theol.* VI.3.17.1-2), the leader-gods (*hoi hegemonikoi theoi*) lift up and unfold all things in the demiurgic unity, including the blessed souls. And the soul (*ba*) of the Pharaoh is the most perfect *tut*, or divine image, which ought to be united with the Demiurge through the rites of ascent.

3. The Living Images of Everlasting Gods

According to Plato, the great statue of the cosmos is animated by the Demiurge who is equivalent to the Egyptian god Ptah. The Heaven as a whole is a living creature, self-moved by its own self-moving soul, because the Demiurge gave the universe the motion proper to its body:

"When the father who had begotten it saw it set in motion and alive, an *agalma* (statue, image, ornament, shrine) brought into being for the everlasting gods (*ton aidion theon gegonos agalma*), he rejoiced and being well pleased he took thought to make it yet more like its pattern. So as that pattern is the Living Being that is for ever existent, he sought to make this universe also like it, so far as might be in that respect. Now the nature of that Living Being was eternal, and this character it was impossible to confer in full completeness on the generated thing. But he took thought to make, as it were, a moving likeness of eternity" (*Tim.*37cd).

This passage may be regarded as the cosmological model for the theory of ontological images (*eikones*) and archetypal imitations. The phrase *theon agalmata* means traditional cult-statues (*ta xoana*), images of the gods, objects of worship established through the different levels of manifested being by the creative energies of divine irradiation. Thus the cultic *agalma* may be regarded as a god whose life stems not from itself but from the living god, the transcendent principle it represents, symbolizes or incarnates.

For the Neoplatonist Julian (Flavius Claudius Julianus, 331-363 A.D.), the Sun is the living statue (*to zon agalma*), endowed with soul and intelligence and regarded as an image of the noetic Father (*Ep.*51.434). The Demiurge is called the *agalmatopoios tou kosmou* by Neoplatonists, which means he produced the cosmos as an *agalma* and fashioned all lower gods as *agalmata.* For Plato (cf. *Leg.*931a), the terms *eikon* and *agalma* are almost synonymous, though not strictly equivalent. The animated cosmos is a living and moving *agalma* of the everlasting gods, therefore all theurgic *agalmata*, those which belong to the lower levels of existence, are modelled according to this pattern. The visible stars which symbolize invisible archetypes (the goal of soul's stellar ascent) are *agalmata* in the sense of divine habitations, vehicles (*ochemata*) which contain the divine presence. Hence, as the entire cosmos receives animating divine energies, so the cult statues, as the receptacles of the sacred powers, properly prepared or engendered by the union of *sophia* and *techne,* receive the invisible rays of the gods.

In the ancient Egyptian texts, these descending irradiations, or noetic and pneumatic rays, are called *bau* (manifestations), *sekhemu* (powers), *kau* (vital principles). However, not only manifestations (*kheperu, bau*) and manifested theophanies or creatures are images: the Creator himself is described as an image (*tut*). Atum, or Amun-Ra, as the divine *tut*, the supreme *imago Dei*, came into being from the ineffable depths of Nun, synonymous with the Neoplatonic One, when no other gods (*neteru*) existed and no name (*ren*) of anything was known. In this sense, he is both (1) *tut* of the supreme unimaginable Source and (2) *tut* as the noetic model and archetype. He is like "an image of the Ineffable that is ineffably identical with the Ineffable" in the Porphyrian metaphysics: the One-Being of the second hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides*', a product and image of the One.

In a papyrus from the reign of the New Kingdom pharaoh Rameses II (1279/1212 B.C.), Amun is described as

"fashioning (*hem*) himself, none knowing his shape (*qi*), goodly nature who came into being as the sacred, secret image (*bes*) who built (*qed*) his images (*seshemu*), who himself created (*qema*) himself, goodly power (*sekhem*) who made good his desire (*ib*), who joined his seed with his body to bring his egg into being within his secret self, being (or manifestation, self-disclosure – *kheper*) who came into being (or disclosed himself – *kheper*), image (or model, archetype, statue – *tut*) of what is fashioned (*mesut*)"[1]

Along with the term *tut*, another term *bes*, used in the text, indicates a reference to the form of the supreme God at the eternal "first moment" of theogony when he reveals himself as the solar *kosmos noetos*, or the archetypal *pleroma* and orders (*taxeis*) of the gods, namely, *bes*, or *tut*, of the ineffable Abyss. This noetic Demiurge who establishes Being, Life, and Intelligence (the divine triad turned into the Ennead) is the model of his own creation and, consequently, of all ontological images irradiated by the divine Sun. A beautiful hymn at the temple of Hibis, carved in the first Persian period (XXVII Dynasty), proclaims that Amun-Ra

"made (*iri*) the gods. (...), wise one excellent of being, intelligent one (...), who began all existence (...), who made great his image (*seshem*) to exalt his beauty, who fashioned (*nebi*) his image (*qi*) according to his desire, he having graced it with the grace of his breath (...), he having created (*qema*) his self, having begotten (*setji*) himself as the great image (*tut*)".[2]

Accordingly, any artist, or theurgist, who conducts the ritual of creation and animation of an image (*tut*), imitates the divine cosmogony, because creative activity and life (*ankh*) are attributes proper to Amun-Ra. This Demiurge made the *kau* of the gods, their vital principles, life energies, and the *ka* of any artist who produces his (i.e., the Demiurge's) material image.

In the Shabaka text of the XXV Dynasty, known as the *Memphite Theology*, it is the supreme Demiurge Ptah who fashioned (*mesi*) the gods and created all things and all hieroglyphs (*medu neter*), i.e., the Forms that constitute the totality of the manifested universe. The coming into being (*kheper*) of creation is articulated by thoughts, images and spoken words:

Ptah conceives of the Ideas of things and invents the archetypal script that Thoth records and utters. Animated images of sacred script are inherent in the structure of the universe as are the Neoplatonic *sumbola* and *sunthemata*. Ptah Tatenen created the bodies (*setut*) of the gods in their likeness, i.e., produced their cultic images:

"And thus the gods entered their bodies of every kind of wood and mineral, all kinds of clay and all other things that grow on him (i.e., Ptah) from whom they originated (*kheper*). And thus assembled around him all gods and their *kau*".[3]

The last line may be rendered also like this: "he has united the gods (i.e., their statues) and their *kau*".

This passage attests the divine origin of the cult statues and indirectly confirms theurgy as an imitation of demiurgy. The statues are *theia erga*, the works of the Demiurge Ptah. In a certain sense, the gods themselves are united with their statues when their vital principles (*kau*) enter their bodies (*setut*). Therefore not only is the cult statue (*seshem, nen*) an image (*tut*) of the Demiurge, but the entire created, or rather manifested, cosmos is a divine statue, the body of Heka (creative Magic) constituted by his powerful images (*sekhemu*) and words (*hekau*). According to the *Leiden Papyrus:*

"All the gods are three:
Amun, Ra, and Ptah, without their seconds.
His identity is hidden in Amun,
His is Ra as face,
His body is Ptah" (*Leid.*300).

4. Animation as a Ritual of Union with the Descending Rays of Ra

The cult statue, like any image, picture, or inscription carved or painted on the temple walls, and like the whole temple itself, had to be animated by the living power of the deity. Likewise, the entire cosmic state, imagined as an ordered symbolic structure, is reanimated by the rays of Ra, or Helios, i.e., the Sun whose rebirth every morning repeats the "first moment" when the self-created noetic scarab beetle (Amun-Kheper-Ra) emerged from the primordial waters of Nun:

"You rose up in this your name of High Hill.
You came into being in this your name of Kheper" (*PT* 1587).

The statue-like *sah*-body of Osiris, his inert corpse, reassembled by Thoth and "being what Anubis has done for him", is animated by the ram-headed *ba* ("soul") of the Sun. As *ba* and statue-like corpse, Ra and Osiris unite at the deepest point in the nocturnal journey through the Duat, or *mundus imaginalis*, which contains everything that has ever existed.

This mysterious nightly union of Osiris-Sokar and the solar *ba* precedes resurrection in the form of a scarab and serves as a model for the mystical rebirth of the initiate who follows the way of Thoth. The solar barque itself turns into a serpent whose fiery breath helps to ignite the new light. The night journey depicted in the New Kingdom Books of the Netherworld shows the path of alchemical transformation, rebirth, theurgic ascent and *apotheosis*.

The union of Ra and Osiris in the Duat is analogous to the ritual union of the hieratic statue with the Sun Disk on the roof of Horus' temple in Edfu, still celebrated at New Year's festival during Roman times. The holy procession of priests carries the statue up the staircase to the rooftop terrace (to the "back" of Heaven, the supercelestial place of Plato's *Phaedrus*, whither the Orphic mystai and the true lovers of wisdom, i.e., philosophers, fly to gaze on the infinite plenitude of light, to behold the spiritual world of Ideas and to contemplate God at its centre) and is described thus:

"Arrival of *hem* (the statue of his majesty Horus) at the Place of the first moment (i.e., of the first occasion, *tep sepi*, the realm of metaphysical realities), so that his *ba* might unite (*sema*) with his image (*sekhem*)".[4]

The first time, *tep sepi*, is entered when the ascending procession reaches the rooftop which symbolizes the back of the goddess Nut, the Platonic *huperouranios topos*, discussed by Proclus in his *Platonic Theology*. According to J. Naydler:

"The concept of the First Time is comparable to that of the realm of being in which the Platonic Ideas exist. In Egyptian thought, though, it is not abstract ideas that are to be found here, but living gods and the archetypal relationships that obtain among them. The First Time is the realm of metaphysical realities conceived in terms of symbolic images and myths. These are the patterns that are reflected in the mundane world and that need to be participated in if mundane events are to be filled with archetypal power".[5]

On the rooftop terrace of the temple, the Eastern *Ba* (Horus, represented by the rising Sun) alights (*khen*) upon his statue (*bes*), his august body (*sah*). In such ritual, "revelation of the Face" occurs and the images (*sekhemu*) of Horus, Hathor or other deities are united with their *bau* in the horizon (*akhet* – the term which also means a pyramid, the location of *akh*, here refers to the rooftop). Thus the *ba* of Ra is established upon the images of *neteru* and their statues (*seshemu*) are renewed, so that they "might live by seeing his [noetic] rays".[6] The Sun-god's (who is *Nous*, the creative Intellect of the Neoplatonists) *ba* (soul, manifested power) is united (*sema*) with the image (*sekhem*) of his *ka*. This union (*sema*) is among the paradigms and prototypes of theurgic union with the divine principle, of the *unio mystica* praised by later philosophers and initiates.

5. Opening of the Mouth and Awakening to Light

In the funerary realm, every mummy (*sah*) had to be reanimated by the living *ba*. Likewise every statue of the deceased, placed inside the tomb, must be animated by his living *ka* in order that the funerary cult could be maintained. In all these cases the quickening of inert matter (which, however, is already alive on a deeper ontological level) is achieved by means of certain *hieratike techne* and employing rituals such as an Opening of the Mouth ceremony. According to the ancients, such rituals were revealed by the gods themselves and actually performed by them (i.e., by the priests who played roles of the gods) following the patterns of *tep sepi*.

The Opening of the Mouth ritual is to be performed for the sacred building as a whole, for the tombs, sarcophagi, heart scarabs, magical figurines (such as *ushebti*) and other objects of the temple and funerary realm. The descent of *ba* and the sacramental union of the falcon-like Horus with his cultic body is described at Edfu in the text from the interior of the holy of holies:

"He alights (*khen*) upon his statue (*bes*), he mingles with (*sensen*) his idol (*akhem*), he embraces (*sekhen*) his image (*sekhem*)".[7]

Once quickened by the Opening of the Mouth ritual[8], a cult statue is considered "alive" on two different levels: (1) the *ka* of the god slept during the night and had been awakened in the morning for the offerings of the daily cult and other ritual activities; (2) the *ba* of the god, whose invisible noetic powers pierce through the material receptacle, maintained a permanent relationship with the intelligible source, or the Demiurge, symbolized by the Sun, though this bond is periodically re-established and rejuvenated through the union with the divine principle.

Certain shapes and material substances of which sacred objects are made were regarded as suitable receptacles or mediums for the spiritual powers of the gods (*neteru*). Heraiskos, the fifth-century Neoplatonist and practising theurgist from the Panopolite nome, who, according to Damascius, fostered the ancestral rites of Egypt and "made his soul to dwell always in sanctuaries and mystic places", confessing that the ancient Egyptians were wiser than himself, was able to divine whether or not the statues of the gods were animated, that is, filled with invisible divine irradiations.[9]

The divine "soul", *ba* (in a certain sense analogous to the immanent Form) makes the cult statue a manifestation of the deity whose epiphany in the religious procession (a ritual counterpart of the Neoplatonic *proodos*) is called "lifting up the beauty". The gods "live" and their life (*ankh*) and interaction constitute reality, but in the New Solar Theology, developed at the beginning of the XVIII Dynasty (1550 B.C.), the "life-giving" action is ascribed to the one world-creating and world-preserving Sun god. Now the "speaking" statue of Amun-Ra is carried in festival processions and this image is regarded as being able both to illumine the entire landscape by its life-giving and sustaining divine light and to provide oracles.

For the ancient Egyptians, the world as a whole was animated from the beginning; therefore any secondary "animation" is synonymous with re-establishing or reactivating the otherwise hidden theurgic relationship between an image (the visible shape of hieroglyph) and a certain spiritual will or power, between a corporeal vehicle (such as the royal throne, sacred barque or any representation carved or painted according to the strict rules of symbolic iconography) and its archetypal principle, its *neter*. Everything here below is an image of its spiritual archetype and is involved in the rhythmic series of "ontological rituals" performed on different levels of being, including the mundane temple rites and funerary ceremonies.

The light-like primordial sound, pronounced by the supreme Creator or the Ennead of gods is characterized by miraculous force; therefore the world is this transcendent sound and the living (*ankh*) noetic (*akh*) image (*tut*) made substantial. The divine words, imbued with demiurgic and theurgic powers (*hekau*, analogous to the Hindu mantras) have animating, purifying, transforming, and elevating powers. They are the *onomata barbara, nomina barbara* praised by the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr.107).

An ability of the cult statue to act (*iri*), to reveal the divine presence and thus to serve as a container of the immanent sacred essence, is a response to the cultic act which can be explained in the light of ancient metaphysics centred on the problems of One and many, descent and ascent, archetypes and images, as well as those of initiation, transformation and spiritual rebirth. In this respect, the symbol of the Eye (*iret*) reveals the dialectic of life and death, the theory of sacrifice, reintegration and theurgic animation. The awakening to light, to the true divine identity, symbolized by the joining together of the scattered limbs of Osiris, is to be understood as psychic and spiritual integration accomplished on different levels of reality. This integration may be expressed and conveyed by the embrace (*sekhen*) that culminates in the quickening process of the image (*tut*).

6. The Sacramental Birth of Statues in Mesopotamia and Egypt

The Egyptian and Mesopotamian archaic theory of animation which deals with metaphysical problems of divine presence, of transcendence and immanence, seems rather strange and exotic only from the modern standpoint, created by the prevailing scorn, misunderstandings and exaggerations, partly raised by Biblical and Protestant polemics against the cult images. These iconoclastic attacks have their hidden purpose: to annex and monopolize the ancient "theurgy", reducing it to the soteriological privilege of certain monotheist communities.

The manufactured icon is transformed into a living body or into an efficacious symbol of deity by the rites called *hidrusis* in Greek and *dedicatio* in Latin. In Mesopotamia, there were two such rituals, designated Mouth Washing (Akkadian *mis pi,* Sumerian *ka-luh-u-da-dingir*) and Mouth Opening (*pit pi, ka-duh-u-da*). Without this ritual, the sacred icon is only a dead product of human artisans which cannot consume food, drink water, beer, wine and smell incense, even if these sacramental activities are not to be understood literally, but rather spiritually.

During the *mis pi* ritual, the image made in the temple atelier (*bit mummi*), the place where the gods are born, is consecrated. The fact that the statue is the work of human hands is ritually denied and the authorship of Ea, the Image Fashioner (*nu-dim-mud*) is confirmed. The Akkadian Ea (Sumerian Enki) is god of the primordial waters (*apsu*), wisdom, magic and incantations, of arts and crafts, being analogous to the Memphite Demiurge Ptah, the Ugaritic Kothar-wa-Hasis, Clever and Skilled Artisan, Hephaistos and Daidalos of the ancient Hellenes.

The statue is produced by the gods themselves, acting through the "skilled artisans who know the secrets"(*ummani le'uti mude pirishti*). This act of a real theogony belongs to the realm of "theurgy" in its etymological and metaphysical sense. In fact, the statue is not even manufactured, but "ceremoniously born" (*ke-nish im-ma-al-du-ma*) in a process which microcosmically repeats all phases of cosmogony. The materials used in the statue are already regarded as divine; therefore the fashioning of the statue (which consists in revealing its *eidos* on the level of material existence) by the artisans, who themselves play the roles of the gods, is a process of assimilating the image with the archetype through the ritualized descent of the Form.

According to Neoplatonists, only divine *Nous* is capable of contemplating the Forms, along with those theurgists (and artisans) established by Athena (*sophia*) in the Maker of the universe, i.e., elevated by purifications, mystic rites and symbols, by hymns and prayers, sacrifices and meditations. Therefore one could say that the human artificer follows the forms created by the divine Artificer (Ea, Ptah, Vishvakarma). He directly contemplates or visualizes (according to the canonized rules) a mental image of the deity through the Eye of the heart-intellect and draws this form from Heaven, the realm of *akh*, where the noetic models of art exist, or from the immanent divine light in the heart.

The god (*ilu*, understood as *salamu*, *salam*, i.e. the statue, completed and perfected in its form) is not simply "produced", but "actually born". In the royal inscription of Sargon II the manufacture of the statue is described using the verb *waladu*, "to beget":

"Nishshiku, creator of everything, begat images of their great divinities, and they took up their daises".[10]

In certain Mesopotamian texts the image is not the product of an artisan, even the Creator Ea, but born of the loins of the gods and goddesses. Therefore V. A. Hurowitz says that "the process of iconoplasty is biological and not technological".[11] We would insist on the designation "metaphysical" instead of "biological", because the autogenesis of statue and conception of the noetic life cannot be treated in terms of modern biology. The Father of the gods is "creator of himself" (*banu ramanishu*) and the Mouth Washing ritual states:

"In Heaven it (the god) is born of itself" (*an-na ni-bi-ta tu-ud-da-am*) and "on Earth it is born of itself" (*ki-a ni-bi-ta tu-ud-da-am: STT* 199).

The incantations of the Mesopotamian *mis pi* ritual stress the statue's ability to smell odours, to see, to hear and even to walk. The *mis pi* ritual, like the Egyptian ritual called *Performing the Opening of the Mouth in the workshop for the statue (tut) of* N., is only the culmination of the theogoninal process. As already attested in the *Pyramid Texts*, the opening of the nose and ears as well as of the mouth and eyes is performed for the dead King, equated to Osiris, whose "head is knit to his bones and his bones are knit to his head" (*PT* 355), and who "provides himself with his iron members" (*PT* 419).

7. The Way of the Golden Falcon

"Your mouth is split open by *dua-ur* in the Mansion of Gold, [your mouth] is split open by the two images which are foremost in the Mansion of Natron, your mouth is split open by Horus with this little finger of his with which [he] split open the mouth of his father, with which he split open the mouth of Osiris" (*PT* 540).

The exemplary theurgic ascent of the King, his animation and becoming divine through the Eye of Horus, is described as a rebirth in the nest of Thoth from the broken egg (*PT* 669), as a fly through the opened doors of the tomb, the doors of Nut (Heaven), and assuming a seat in the solar barque of Ra. He ascends as the reconstructed statue, "reassembled by Thoth" (*PT* 448) and raising his "iron bones", his "golden members": "for this body of yours belongs to a god" (*PT* 723). Thus, the statue-like King, the son of Ra, is "a sacred image, the most sacred of the sacred images of the Great One" (*PT* 273-4). His face is that of a jackal, his arms are those of a falcon, his wing-feathers are those of Thoth, his savour is the savour of a god, the savour of the Eye of Horus, because Horus has split open his eye that he may see with it in its name of "she who opens the way of the god" (*PT* 638), to fly up to the sky and be equated with Thoth, "the mightiest of the gods" (*PT* 524).

In the course of complicated ritual drama, which includes sacrifices and incantations, the mouth of the statue is touched with various implements, perhaps artisans' tools, the little finger of the *sem*-priest and the adze called *neterty* (*neter* means a god, divine principle and spiritual power). The ritual imitates certain divine events and precedents, and its purpose is not only to make the statue a fit object for the cult (by opening hidden channels of grace), but also to serve for the theurgic *apathanatismos*, for turning the mortal human statue into the immortal divine statue. In this case, both the descent and ascent of the immortal light, of the divine *bau* (spiritual energies, manifestations) are to be viewed as inseparable and interpenetrating. The powers involved in such operations are higher than all human wisdom. And this is exactly the definition of theurgy provided by Iamblichus and Proclus. The King, who is the perfect *imago dei*, embodies perfect Wisdom, for he "becomes Sia who bears the god's book, who is at the right hand of Ra" (*PT* 250). His throne is over the spirits, or intellects (*akhu*), he unites hearts and his "limbs are the Imperishable Stars" (*PT* 570). Hence, he is the Theurgist *par excellence*.

The Egyptian initiates, who followed this archetypal example of the ascending Mystagogue, the way of the divine golden falcon, were concerned to enter and experience states of consciousness which reveal their true identities and the ineffable unity of all. Since the conception of *tut*, the living (*ankh*) image of god (e.g, Atum, Ptah, Amun) has both external and internal meaning, the fashioning of the material statue and procreation of the spiritual body are analogous processes. The inner alchemical body, symbolized by gold, or other metals, is created following the patterns of Osirian transformation which, among other things, includes the gathering of limbs and the reconstruction of an archetypal *eidos*, accomplished by Anubis, the guide of initiates, as well as animation and resurrection on the level of *anima mundi*. The way of transformation and ascent is the way of Thoth who makes the Eye of Horus intact and integral, which means, besides other interpretations, the spiritual restoration of the heart-intellect and rebirth.

8. When the Womb-like Tomb is Opened

The process of making a statue by the technique of lost wax casting imitates the mystical way aimed at regeneration and theurgic union with the divine. Some rituals performed in the Egyptian temples, as well as their own architectural designs and structures, follow this both metaphysical and mythological pattern step by step. Let us briefly analyse the sequence of the process.

At first, the gathering together of an image, joining together the limbs of a statue or the dismembered body of Osiris is accomplished by (1) the creation of a form in wax for the metal statue to be cast, or (2) the spiritual integration, purification of body and heart, and mental concentration. The gathering together of an image outlines the inner *ba* form which needs to be transformed into gold (*akh*-spirit and its golden body).

This stage is followed by vitalization. The model made of beeswax is coated with clay and thus turned into a clay ball, analogous to the cosmogonical egg (the Egg of the Great Cackler which "lives" and "breathes the air", given by Atum), and the imagined (or painted) *sphaira*-like figure, used in spiritual exercises, known to Plotinus. The sphere is regarded as an icon of deity, the world as a whole which contains a sacred image of the god within. Keeping watch over this image, Plotinus removes both space and the imaginary conception of matter, calling upon the god (whose imaginary conception is held) to come (*Enn.* V.8.9.11). The heated and thus violated metal is poured into the mould. This action is analogous to the entering into the realm of life (*ankh*), animation by the heart which means "by the ray of *Nous*", the breath of life (*suh en ankh*). According to the spell for giving breath in the realm of the dead:

"I am the jackal of jackals, I am Shu who draws the air into the presence of the sunshine to the limits of the sky, to the limits of the earth, to the limits of the plume of the *nebeh*-bird, and air is given to those youths who open my mouth so that I may see with my eyes" (*BD* 55).

The universe, including the sensible realm, is equally dependent on the constant influx of this life-giving force, the breath of Amun. Therefore to make a sculpture in Egyptian means "to enliven, to revive". The transcendent divine essences, the gods in Heaven and their earthly images are thus co-ordinated. The Egyptian sculptor, the follower of Ptah and the initiate of Imhotep-Nefertum, is "the reviver". His imaginal operations – both external and internal - imitate the patterns established by the gods; therefore his art and the path of spiritual realization coincide.

The last phase of *ergon* consists in breaking the mould and revealing the perfect image, the beautiful divine statue. This is a birth of the god, analogous to spiritual rebirth, symbolized by the casting off of the mummy's bondage:

"The doors of the tomb are opened for you, the doors of Nut are unbolted for you... remove the mask which is on your face, loosen your bonds, for they are not bonds, they are the tress of Nepthys... that you may become divine" (*PT* 553).

The term *sah* means (1) the ritually embalmed body, turned into the archetypal icon of Osiris, the corpse of Sokar, his "mysterious image", i.e. the mummy wrapped in his strips of linen and likened to the silkworm cocoon, the pupa of the scarab, and (2) the star of Osiris, the luminous spiritual or stellar body. The breaking off happens when the barque of Ra reaches the 10th hour of the Night[12] in the Duat, itself symbolized by the body of goddess Nut, the heavenly Cow who is eternally giving birth to the world of spiritual forms (stars). This goddess represents the overarching divine presence, in whose cosmic embrace all things rest, though she is only secondarily connected with sensory phenomena. The night journey of the Sun-god's *ba* is the model of all alchemical gestations in the womb of Nut-Hathor, the womb-like tomb (which imitates the primordial mound and the cave of primordial darkness), sarcophagus-vessel, cauldron, the nest of Thoth, and both the physical and mental body of the artisan, for all formations, transformations and the "foetal quickenings" which lead to the final maturation and birth. The mystery of spiritual realization and immortalization is based on this polysemantic pattern.

9. Divine Beauty and the Inner Golden Statue: From Egyptian Theology to Plotinus

The opening of the ball, or the egg, means the appearance of the divine body, itself like the golden sphere (*aten*) of Ra, or the golden (sometimes green) scarab which symbolizes the noetic fullness of Atum, the restored heart-intellect of the initiate, who is a perfect "philosopher" (in the sense of Plato's *Phaedo* 67cd, that "true philosophers make dying their profession") and can therefore be regarded as "dead", now reborn.

The divine powers may be temporarily incarnated in a human body (which itself is a *sunthema* for the Neoplatonists) during the theurgic rituals. According to Proclus, some things pertaining to the statues established by the telestic art, are manifest, others are inwardly concealed: they symbolize the presence of the gods and are only known to the telestic artisans themselves (*In Tim.* I.273e). We do not know exactly what kind of *sunthemata* were used in the Neoplatonic rites of animation. However, the practice of concealing certain symbols, even entire sacred books, shells, and flowers, inside the statues, to use the mantric words of power (*hekau*), written formulas (the Neoplatonic *engrammata*) in hieroglyphic script, and images (*eikones, charakteres, schemata*) is common in the Egyptian tradition. Similar practices are attested even in classical Hellenic Hekate-magic (Diodorus *Bibl. hist.*4.51).

All these *pharmaka, sumbola*, and *sunthemata* are analogous to the Egyptian amulets (hearts, buckles of Isis, *djed* pillars, collars of gold, papyrus sceptres, human-headed falcons, ladders, Eyes of Horus, *shen*-symbols, *ankh*-symbols, scarabs, some inscribed with *hekau,* words of power), which are placed on (1) the living human body (which itself resembles a "statue") or (2) the embalmed *sah*-body (mummy), along with incenses, oils, perfumes and flowers. Any amulet (*meket, sa, wedjat*) which attracts and preserves divine energies and manifestations (*bau*) is a sort of *sunthema*. Animated statues, images, symbols and amulets work through the theurgic *heka*-power, and *heka* is regarded as the *ba* of Ra (Amun-Ra, Atum-Ra). The Hellenic *telesmata*, concealed or visible telestic images, especially animated statues, also had power to avert disaster and provide protection. According to the historian Zosimus, the theurgist Nestorius saved Athens from an earthquake in 375 A.D. by dedicating a statue of Achilles, regarded as a *telesma*, in the Parthenon following the instructions provided by the gods in a dream (4.18).[13]

According to Proclus:

"As an initiator into the mysteries, by placing certain symbols about statues, renders them more adapted to the participation of the superior powers (*ho telestes sumbola atta tois agalmasi perititheis epitedeiotera auta kathistesin eis metousian dunameon hupertepon*), thus also total nature fashioning bodies, by physical productive powers, the statues of souls (*agalmata ton psuchon*), disseminates a different aptitude in different bodies for the reception of different souls, the better and the worse (*In Tim.* I.51ef).

The passage confirms that animation is closely related to the theory of Ideas, or archetypal cosmogonical Forms, which Plato detached from the initial cultic sphere and rendered into rational philosophical discourse, thus building a solid scientific basis for the later Neoplatonic versions of theurgy. Every classicist remembers the passage from the *Enneads* of Plotinus (I.6.9.7ff), which may be understood not only in its intended metaphorical sense, because such metaphor itself stems from the realm of theurgic techniques and rituals, partly inherited by Hellenic philosophy. The passage alludes to the *Phaedrus* (252d, 254b), where Plato speaks of the lover who works on the soul of his beloved, fashioning it into the likeness of the god, their common divine archetype, and it runs as follows:

"How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; ... and never stop 'working on your statue' (*tektainon to son agalma*) till the divine glory of virtues shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat'. If you have become this, and see it, and are home with yourself in purity ... wholly yourself, nothing but true light (*phos alethinon monon*), not measured by dimensions, or bounded by shape into littleness, or expanded to size by unboundedness, but everythere unmeasured, because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; when you see that you have become this, then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended..." (*Enn.* I.6.9.7ff).

The "inner statue" is the golden body of the Egyptian theology, the ascending soul (*ba*) turned into luminous eternal spirit (*akh*). Thus through the sensuous body (*sthula-sharira*), to put it into the cultic terms of Hindu Tantra, an image which is interiorized and serves as a pointer to, or a diagram (*yantra*) of, the unseen noetic realm, the spiritual essence (*suksma-sharira*), or the divine presence, is revealed. Both external and internal images are symbolic constructs (*pratika*) whereby what is invisible and immaterial (*amurta*) is represented as visible and material (*murta*). External worship *(bahyayaga*) of the statue is necessarily accompanied by meditation (*manasa-puja*) on its outward form as well as its unembodied state, the noetic Form, or Idea. The seer and the object contemplated must be united. The worshipper is turned into the god (*ishta-devata*) he adores: he ascends to the *akh* realm and actually becomes Ra. So the initiate, whose *ba* is transformed and united with divine principles, may attest:

> "I am Thoth, the favoured of Ra; Lord of strength who ennobles him who made him; great of magic (*heka*) in the Barque of Millions of Years; master of laws ... who does what Ra in his shrine approves" (*BD* 182).
>
> "My head is that of Ra who is united with Atum ..., my tongue is that of Ptah, my throat is that of Hathor, for I have recalled with my mouth the speech of Atum..." (*BD* 82).
>
> "I am he who dwells in his Eye, I have come that I may give *maat* to Ra" (*BD* 96).
>
> "Let me see Ra" (*BD* 65).
>
> "I am he in whom is the Sacred Eye" (*BD* 42).
>
> "I am Ra" (*BD* 42).

Plotinus affirms almost the same, though in philosophical terms:

"No eye ever saw the Sun without becoming Sun-like... You must become first all godlike (*theoeides*) and all beautiful if you intend to see God and beauty. First the soul will come in its ascent to intellect (*anabainon epi ton noun*) and there will know the Forms, all beautiful, and will affirm that these, the Ideas, are beauty; for all things are beautiful by these, by the products of intellect and essence (*panta gar tautais kala, tois nou gennemasi kai ousias: Enn.* I.6.9.30ff).

The Egyptian term *nefer* signifies both "beauty" and "goodness", and also means happiness, joy and other related ideas, especially those of the divine realm. The hieroglyph *nefer* is a composite of the heart and trachea, and in fact belongs to the same type as the "union" (*sema*) hieroglyph. All gods (*neteru*) radiate beauty and their statues are beautiful (*nefer*) and alive (*ankh*). Both the appearance of the cult-statue and the transformed inner body (equated to a statue-hieroglyph, like the Hindu *asana*) of the initiate are called "lifting up the beauty" which represents the golden splendour (*meskhau*). As the cult image (*sekhem, tut*) is united (*sema*) with the descending *ba* of the noetic Sun, so the ascending human *ba*, already purified and made beautiful, seeks to unite with its divine archetype, the perfect and beautiful disk (or sphere, *aten*) of Ra.

Now the following conclusion should be drawn. Though the Neoplatonic *telestike* cannot be reconstructed in detail, the principles which grounded its existence and theurgic efficacy may be outlined by investigating the cultic metaphysics and cosmogonical patterns of ancient civilizations and the Platonic tradition itself. The most striking is the realization that along with the external cultic dimension of animated images and statues there is their inner esoteric dimension which is concerned with the spiritual *dromena*, the completion *(telete* in its etymological sense) of the intelligible statue. In this final stage of solar knowledge (*gnosis*) a seer (*epoptes*) becomes "blessed" (*makarios*); he is reborn as the luminous and intelligent spirit (*akh*), now entering the divine body (*sah*) of light attached to the Sun barque. Thus the soul becomes Ra. This is the theurgic *apathanatismos,* immortalization through the noetic life (the breath of Shu) and union (*sema*) with the divine.

1 David Lorton *The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt*.- Born in Heaven, Made on Earth. The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East, ed. by Michael B. Dick, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999, pp.185-186

2 Ibid., p.184

3 Jan Assmann *The Mind of Egypt. History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002, p.353

4 M. Alliot *Le Culte d'Horus a Edfou au temps des Ptolemees*, vol. 1, Bibliotheque d'Etude 20/1, Cairo: Institut Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 1949, p.306

5 Jeremy Naydler *Temple of the Cosmos. The Ancient Egyptian Experience of the Sacred*, Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1996, p.93

6 M. Alliot, ibid., p.334

7 David Lorton, ibid., p.197

8 See: T. J. C. Baly *Notes on the Ritual of Opening the Mouth*.- The Journal of Egyptian Archeology, vol. XVI, London, 1930, pp.173-186

9 Garth Fowden *The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society*.- Journal of Hellenic Studies CII, 1982, p.47

10 Victor Avigdor Hurowitz *The Mesopotamian God Image, From Womb to Tomb*,- Journal of the American Oriental Society 123, 1, 2003, p.151

11 Ibid., p.152

12 Alison Roberts *My Heart My Mother. Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt*, Trowbridge: North Gate Publishers, 2000, p.172

13 E. R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p.294

TELESTIC TRANSFORMATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL REBIRTH

1. Philosophy in the Tomb-Sanctuary

If philosophy means preparation for death, a tomb may be regarded as a school of wisdom, if not a birthplace of philosophy. However, to say that by building a tomb for oneself one is "philosophizing" may appear as sheer madness to the contemporary reader who is unaware that the monumental tombs of pharaonic Egypt are not graves in any Christian or modern sense.

The tomb is to be regarded as a sanctuary where the main symbol of Osiris lies in the coffin. Since "death" means one's "Osirification" and is an expression of transcendence, of life in the hidden (*sheta*) state, the "dead gods" should be viewed as those who hide themselves in the state which seems to be "unmanifested" from the standpoint of external phenomena. This hidden (*amun*) state in the Duat is not conceived as being formless. The *bau* in the Duat are hidden (*sheta*) because their form cannot be seen unless illuminated by Ra. Likewise the *Set-urt*-sanctuary in the Edfu temple is called "the Seat-of-hiding" (*set-amun*):

"The gods are in their chapels, the Ennead is in its hall, the Hidden-one (Amun) is hidden in the Seat-of-hiding" (Edfu VII.12.4).

However, the hidden world contains all components of the world that may be manifested when the gods through the rite of appearance, or procession (*khai*), emerge from the "snake" and turn the temple into the House-of-appearance (*per khai*).

The rite of mummification is the rite of divinization or transmutation of the human body to the symbolic body of Osiris. This procedure is not aimed at conservation of the corpse, but rather of its deconstruction and, then, of reconstruction, thereby creating the cultic symbol of Osiris. In this respect, the mummy hidden in the burial chamber is equivalent to the cultic statue in the temple.

However, the statue of the deceased and his mummy are related to different ontological states. According to R. B. Finnestad, the statue is related to the *ka*-life of the deified deceased; therefore the offerings should not be regarded as a way of sustaining his existence in the beyond, but only his *ka*-life. The mummy is related to the *ba*-life of the deified deceased, i.e., to his life in the beyond.[1] Therefore the Opening of the Mouth ritual carried out on the statue makes this symbol of earthly cultic life operative, while when carried out on the mummy (since through the mummification the dead man's body is transformed to the body of Osiris) it makes this symbol of a "dead god" operative, introducing the divine presence into the tomb-sanctuary.

The ritual performed on the mummy, however, corresponds to the consecration of a cult statue. The statue, the mummy, and the coffin are symbolic representations of the deceased, his cultic images, but not the dead man himself.[2] R. B. Finnestad says:

"The deified man is… rendered cultically accessible through animating his statue with his *ka.* If his *ka* cannot resort to a statue, the dead man does not live an earthly life of the kind implied by the concept of *ka.* When the mummy is the object, attention is directed to the transcendent aspect of the dead man. The ritual has an evocative function: the Osiris is called from the beyond to be present in the sanctuary. This aspect of the dead man is mythically expressed by the concept of his *ba* that flies like a bird from the closed burial chamber".[3]

In some cases the *ba* of the deceased is depicted outside the tomb watching the Opening of the Mouth ritual performed on the mummy. T. Burckhardt, however, thinks that the mummy and its mask function as receptacles of the psycho-somatic *ka*-forces, or the lower psychic modalities that had already been transformed during the man's lifetime. He says:

"According to Egyptian doctrine, the lower subtle modality of man, which the Hebrews call the 'breath of remains' and which normally dissolves after death, can be held and fixed by the sacred form of the mummy. This form - or this mask – thus plays, in relation to this assemblage of diffuse and centrifugal subtle forces, the role of a formative principle: it sublimates this 'breath' and fixes it, making of it a kind of link between this world and the soul of the dead man, a bridge by means of which the incantations and offerings of the survivors can reach the soul, and by means of which its blessings can reach them".[4]

The offerings should be understood, first and foremost, in terms of this need of the survivors to make contact with the dead man: the offering table in the form of *ka*-arms accepts gifts of food, while the *ba* transcends this mortuary realm of communication. The mummy's mask is not a portrait of the dead man, but represents his archetypal form, his unchanging *eidos* made visible.

2. The Tomb as a Threshold of Light

The Egyptian royal tomb, especially that of the late New Kingdom, is a model of the cosmos and the temple of divine rites. It symbolizes the primordial mound and the womb of Nut-Hathor, the furnace of alchemical transformations and of spiritual gold-making. From the perspective of semiotics and hermeneutics, the tomb is a holy book full of theological texts and images. From the theurgic point of view, the tomb is a set of *heka* powers and efficacious *sunthemata*, partly embodied in the stone (as building material, itself possessing certain magic properties). Accordingly, it is a kind of theurgic construction analogous to the Hindu *yantra* (geometric diagram). *Yantra,* as a special geometric schema or sacred icon, is a theurgic tool or any device, instrument, or mechanism used for carrying out a specific, especially magic, task. According to H. Zimmer:

"Whenever pure, divine Consciousness (*brahman*) binds Itself with the magic of its *maya* and assumes in play the form of human consciousness, then It may naively feel Itself to be part of a many-sided, variegated, articulated, and interconnected world; and so It may devoutly worship the personified divinities who inform this interconnected world, revering them in contemplation, images, and symbolic signs so that It might find Its way through the world which is unfolded before human consciousness; but when Consciousness elevates Itself to become the will to experience, as a totality and unity, Its own essence spread out in rich variety – the will to enter into Itself to find repose – then images and signs will serve as tools (yantras) for bringing about the union (*samadhi*) of perceiver and perceived".[5]

Among the hieroglyphs related to funerary buildings is a picture of the Upper Egyptian shrine of Hierakonpolis which served as a determinative for the word *kar*, or *kari* (chapel). The symbol of a double stairway was a determinative for the noun meaning ascent. The Upper Egyptian pavilion-like shrine of the vulture goddess Nekhbet was known as the Great House (*per-ur, per-wer, per-aa*, Hellenized as "pharaoh"). The word *per* usually means "house" or "household" (*oikos*) and designates a temple as the totality of a deity's possessions, including the landed domains and workshops, contrasted to the actual temple, (the "god's house": *het neter, hut neter*) built of stone. Like the servants in a household, the priests are called *hemu-neter,* "servants of the god".

In a simplified form, the Upper Egyptian shrine became the *kar* – a type of chapel or portable shrine which housed the image of the god in temples and was carried in processions. When the doors (*aa*) of the shrine are opened by a priest in a daily service, it means that the gates of heaven are opened. Coffins and certain ritual pavilions containing the statues of deceased and divinized pharaohs were made in the form of this shrine.

The Lower Egyptian shrine of the serpent goddess Wadjet is the House of Flame (*per-nu*). Many coffins and sarcophagi (even the mastaba tomb of the V Dynasty pharaoh Shepseskare) were made in this shape.

Usually the tomb is called *akhet,* the "horizon" or threshold of light, the place of "rebirth" where the rejuvenated sun (symbolizing the immortal *spiritus,* or *intellectus*) rises. As an *akhet,* the tomb incarnated Osiris-Sokar himself. Here Osiris and Ra are reunited and deceased human beings acquire *im-akh,* blessedness, regarded as illumination, achieved by rising through the spinal column – through the body of the Snake, or the Crocodile, through which the Night-Sun passes. According to the Alexandrian alchemist Olympiodorus, Osiris was a synonym for lead and his tomb the symbol of *chemia*, i.e., an art of the Perfect Black (*teleion melas*) of casting or alloying metals and transforming the soul into spiritual gold.

In Late period Egypt, the tombs of gods are also depicted as being on earth, even the tombs of the uncreated primordial Ogdoad, thereby indicating that the "tomb" is rooted in the Beyond Being and is both 1) a symbol of the hidden divine dimension and 2) the temple-body-book-like cosmos in miniature. So the tomb embodies certain theological formulas and metaphysical realities.

All these things must be remembered when examining the *soma-sema* (body-tomb) formula which occurs for the first time in Plato's *Gorgias*. Socrates cites Euripides as saying "Who knows, if life be death, and death be life?" and continues:

"Perhaps we too are dead, for I heard this from some wise man, that now we are dead, and that for us the body is a tomb" (*Gorg.*492e-493a).

This unnamed sage, surely a follower of Orpheus or Pythagoras, distinguished 1) those initiated into the mysteries of Hades, the unseen world, and 2) the foolish uninitiated men who

"will carry water to pour into a perforated jar in a similarly perforated sieve. And by the sieve, my informant told me, he means the soul, and the soul of the foolish he compared to a sieve, because it is perforated and through lack of belief and forgetfulness unable to hold anything" (Gorg.493bc).

In the *Cratylus* Plato refers to Orpheus who viewed the body as *sema*, and this word stands not only for a tomb, but also for a firm enclosure able to keep the incarnated soul within its limits. Therefore the body (*soma*) functions as a fence (*peribolos*) around the soul:

"Since the soul does penance for those things it is expiating, it has the body (*soma*) as a fence (*sema*), in order that it may be saved (*sozetai*), an image of a prison" (*Crat.*400c).

In fact, *sema* as a safeguarding enclosure, equated to the body, is the material dwelling of the soul, his protective house in the Egyptian sense of *per*. At the same time it is a temple: if the ritual service is being kept intact, the "philosophizing" soul is protected from destructive psychic forces and disorder (*isefet*). The tomb is a kind of magic *temenos* and *peribolos*, constructed around the House of Gold (*per neb*), the burial chamber where *sah*-body lies within the sacred mandala guarded by Isis, Nephtys, Neith, and Selket, and where the transcendent birth-giving takes place.

As C. J. de Vogel pointed out, Plato regarded "imprisonment" in the body as a means of salvation: "he understood the challenge of life in a positive sense, as a task given to man by a divine order, not at all as a misfortune".[6] This is a theurgic point of view: the hierophant must assimilate all the powers he encountered in embodiment. The descent (*kathodos*) of the soul into the particular human body is recognized by Plotinus as the soul's essential task to order and govern all subsequent lower manifestations:

"If the inclination (*neusis*) is an illumination (*ellampsis*) to what is below it is not a sin, for if it did not exist the soul would have nowhere to illuminate. The soul is said to go down (*katabainein*) or decline (*neuein*) in the sense that the thing which receives the light from it lives with it" (*Enn.* I.1.12.25-29).

The soul is *ba* of Ra, and its return *in patriam* is return to Atum-Kheper-Ra. Theurgy joins the soul with 1) the intellectual Power, which arranges the cosmos, and with 2) the anagogic Power leading to noetic Truth. Iamblichus described eight such Powers, related to different Egyptian gods presiding over ascending degrees of priestly initiation. The soul must be perfectly established in the activities, thoughts and creations of these Powers:

"Then, indeed, it establishes the soul in the Creator God in his entirety. And this is the goal of the hieratic ascent according to the Egyptians" (*De myster.*292.16-18).

For Plato, the soul's identity is the "Ra-nature" as well: the being which has its origin and roots in an order beyond visible things. The winged soul, or rather the higher part of the soul, equated to *nous*, the immortal and divine part in us, attains to knowledge of the truth, though the state of being bound in an earthly body (*khat,* which is sharply contrasted to the intelligible body of light, symbolized by a mummy in the Egyptian tomb) touches it in so far as it has undergone a hard struggle against the Sethian darkness, a sort of *jihad* for spiritual survival by dominating the lower psychic forces. These forces (along with body itself), if properly ritualized, purified and controlled, may help the higher soul in its ascent (*anodos*), or may drag it down if they are dominated by Apep (Apophis), the snake of non-existence and darkness.

The solar barque is to be defended against the constant attacks of this iconographically crystallized image of evil, the enemy of Ra and all the gods, the monster of destruction who wishes to overthrow the ordered cosmos of solar theophanies. In everyday life the Egyptians were constantly engaged in fighting this enemy, trying ritually or by the purity of their hearts to recover and keep the equilibrium both of the cosmos and of themselves.

The body as such is not an evil thing, but a vessel of divine presence, the house of *ba*. Therefore only the corruptible mortal side of corporeality must be neglected or rather transformed, as far as possible, into the icon of intelligible forms. The Egyptian tomb as a bridge between visible and invisible is the most important thing on earth, since "the time that one spends on earth is only a dream", according to *The Harper's Song* (Theban Tomb 50). To build a tomb is the main work for which man lives. It is at once the investment of all his material resources, his philosophical way of life, and the theurgic door to the beyond.

In fact, the tomb is built for the gods so as to affirm their eternal order and ritual of creation. To say that the mystery of the tomb and the corpse was "of this world" is to misinterpret the metaphysical nature of sensible reality which is never merely "this world" of the Cartesian subject, but rather *ta neteru*, "the land of the gods", the metaphysical realm poured into the physical. The "inner world" surrounds the ancient Egyptian consciousness as the "physical landscape", as the terrestrial body of Geb, symbolically articulated and turned into a display of divine words (*medu neter*) and of theurgic *sunthemata*.

3. Sacrificial Alchemy of Tombs and Altars

During their cultic service, the Egyptian priests are lifted up into union with the gods, yet remain in their mortal bodies. The Neoplatonist would say that divine light possesses their hieratic imagination – as if they are entering the solar barque, the luminous *ochema*. This is achieved through sacrificial rites which recapitulate cosmogony or in *photagogia*, the descent of solar rays, although their mortal thinking may remain the same as usual.

The tomb is an integral part of the solar circuit, the archetypal *schema* of eternal creation, of descent (*ba* moves down to the corpse of Osiris) and ascent (*ba* moves up to the spirit-intellect of Ra). Osiris and Ra constitute the metaphysical unity; therefore both the tomb and the body are necessary in the system of divine semiotics.

According to G. Shaw, the number of the body is called *bomiskos* (5x6x7=210) by the Pythagoreans, *bomiskos* being the diminutive form of *bomos*, the term for the altar of blood sacrifice. The soul is a spherical number (6x6x6=216) rooted in 6, the first number to blend the divisible with the indivisible; therefore to enter the sphere (*aten*, the solar orb of Ra) means to be initiated in the "bloodless secret" of the altar.[7]

The body is produced from *bomiskos*. The sacrificial alchemy of *ba* depicts the change from body to spirit and then to body again at the higher ontological level, and this operation symbolizes a drama of death and rebirth. The altar is a womb of transformation. It is analogous both to the material human body and the tomb, made for one's *ka* and for the theurgic icon of *sah*-body in the holy land of Sokar, in the beautiful West.

In Vedic India, the sacrificial altar, *vedi*, compared with the earth-navel, the womb, was female, and the ritual fire, *agni*, male. Their union brought forth the offspring – as the union of Isis and Osiris brought forth Horus, and that of Sekhmet and Ptah produced Nefertum, born out of the primeval lotus flower.

Sacrifice is a rending-apart of the unity of things and its restoration: the model for the activities of initiates, dialecticians, and grammarians, who follow the same pattern albeit on different levels. The altar (and the human body as well) is the sacred *topos* where the breakdown and reunification, death and reanimation, *proodos* and *epistrophe* take place. During the rite performed, the sacrificer becomes the entire manifested universe with all its demiurgic energies leading towards multiplicity and back to unity. Ultimately, the whole cosmic body (the universe as the Temple of Amun-Ra) is involved in the rite of sacrifice which finally ends in the restoration of the Eye of Horus, beatification, and "satisfaction" (*hotep, hetep*, also meaning "offering", a central concept in the ritual, viewed as an interaction between the gods themselves).

This temple-like cosmos is also the tomb and the alchemical laboratory. The rituals enacted in tombs and temples symbolically intervene in cosmic events and their noetic paradigms. The stone material itself was first used by Imhotep who cast the Djoser's *sed* festival of rejuvenation into stone, symbolizing the divine realm of permanence and incorruptibility, crystallized as the primordial noetic stone of *ben-ben* in Heliopolis. The forms executed in stone and decorated by script and images, curiously designated as "gods", show the intrinsically sacred character of stone in the Old Kingdom.

This is a probable source of the concept of the "philosophical stone" in late alchemical traditions (if this powerful symbol is not simply a prolongation and development of the "Paleolithic metaphysics"), because the stone was clearly seen as an interface between the visible world and the noetic reality, that is, the form where the deity became manifest from the primeval cone-shaped *ben-ben* down to the cultic statues and tombs.

The art of architecture was designed to shape, measure and control the path to salvation monumentalized in the visible configuration of intelligible Forms. Therefore a pyramid (*mer*), as it makes visible the invisible divine radiance, is called *akhet* and serves as a gigantic material *sunthema* for the ascent to heaven and inclusion within the circuit of Ra. As the *ba* of Ra ascends from the Duat, symbolized by the body of Nut, to the *akhet* and appears as a new-born Scarab, so the pharaoh's *ba* ascends by way of its *akhet* (pyramid).

Akhet, meaning that "radiant place" where the sun rises and sets, the Sun-door, and the land of the blessed, the noetic sphere of immortality, is the feminine form of *akh* which designates the spiritual state of being, the goal of initiation, transformation and ascent. The initiation rites, or the royal spiritual path to first principles, furnished the prototypes of Egyptian funerary religion. The utterances known to us as the *Pyramid Texts* (the oldest substantial and esoteric corpus of religious texts known to mankind) and other theurgic instruments are employed in order to transform *ba* into a spirit of light (*akh*). This function is replicated by the architectural forms of stone pyramids and tombs.

The sacred territories of temples and the symbolical structures of tombs mirror the topography of the heavenly realm, and therefore must be regarded as images (*eikones*) of the related divine archetypes. No wonder that a pyramid is equated to the name of the deceased pharaoh (Osiris), because sacred speech (the sequence of hieratic names) served as a means of making the transcendent realm of meaning manifest in the immanent realm of symbolic objects and actions. Cultic speech and script transferred celestial events to the terrestrial domain and vice versa.

Accordingly, the *heka* of the spoken and written word not only provided the means of transposing noetic realities into material symbols and rituals, but also of elevating the initiate (for every true initiate is a "deceased" in the philosophical sense) to the archetypal realm where all earthly capacities achieve their richest noetic fulfilment, their *telos*. The verb *sakh* means to transfigure, to transfer into the "radiant place", and this ontic transfiguration may be described either as the "god's ascending to his horizon", or as spiritual rebirth.

Like the Neoplatonic term *skopos*, *akh* designates the aim of all human thoughts, words, and actions that are able to reach out into the realm of noetic archetypes, thereby constituting a certain particular bios, that is, the "philosophical way of life", the spiritual path of "builders". The "builders" are those who are vigilant about the concerns of eternity (*neheh*): they build the tomb, *akhet*, and construct the alchemical body of light. Hence, to erect a "tomb", both in a material and spiritual (inner) sense, means to strive for the *akh*. The material tomb houses the embalmed corpse (*sah*-image) on the Osirian level. It serves as a symbol for the intelligible *akhet* which houses the resurrected divine body (*sah*), shining with gold on the Ra level.

4. Alchemical Passage through Death

Egyptian alchemy inherited and transmitted the Osirian concept of initiation-ordeals, of death and rebirth, applied to alchemical bodies and involving their changes from one qualitative level of life to another. Hellenic antiquity regarded this art of the mysterious "stone" as "philosophy" transmitted by Thoth and Anubis. Sometimes the "stone" is likened to lightning on a dark night, the Heraclitean *keraunos*, the lightning flash, or thunderbolt, that guides and governs all things, leading to qualitative change and a new ontic level of comprehension.

The Philosopher's Stone symbolizes the circular movement: up-and-down and down-and-up, *katabasis* and *anabasis*. This Stone may be equated to the Phoenix (the Heliopolitan *bennu* bird on the top of *ben-ben*), the Egg in which All is included and a ferment of transformations is actualized, also with the Snake curving round with his tail in his mouth, sometimes enclosing Osiris as a mummy. As J. Lindsay pointed out:

"The resurrection that the alchemist seeks in himself and in his materials… is something that exists and manifests itself here and now… It is the movement from a lower level of life to a higher level, from one level of consciousness to a level with a qualitatively higher centre of organisation".[8]

Alchemy is inseparable from the theory of sacrifice. The sacrificial interpretation of life and all of its ritualized activities is based on noetic archetypes. According to this theological perspective, all our actions are actions of the Lord of Life, "a high Nile, on whose *ka* one lives, who provides for gods and men":

"His right Eye is the day,
His left Eye is the night,
It is He who guides the faces on all the ways.
His body is the primeval Water,
His entrails are the Inundation
That creates everything that is and keeps all that exists alive.
His breathing is the breath in every nose,
His are destiny and fortune for everyone" (*Pap. Leiden* I.350.5.19.20).

As the hidden Sun (*suryam gulham*) of the *Rg Veda* (V.40.6), He is to be found in the heart, as the All-worker (*vishvakarma*). Following this ancient theology of *pantheos*, the cosmogonical conquest of Ahi-Vrtra by Indra for the sake of Agni and Soma, the slaying and eating of the Snake (like the Egyptian Apophis), may be interpreted as the domination of the lower *ba* by the *Ba* of Amun. The self is ruled by the Self. Ahi-Vrtra stands as a mythological equivalent of Prajapati and Purusha – the archetypal *Anthropos*, who is dismembered in the process of demiurgy as are Osiris and Dionysus.

In a sense, the Sacrificer is himself a victim. His dramatic fate depicts the supernatural dialectic of the One and Many, the Principle (Monad) and its creative emanations. Since any procession is also reversion, the second phase of sacrifice consists in putting together again that which had been dismembered and scattered, and in building up the body of Osiris at a higher ontological level. Accordingly, every deceased who enters the Osirian Duat is "dismembered" in the realm of this world and "reconstituted" in the Netherworld as Osiris: his previous separate self "disappears" or radically changes its identity, being re-named and integrated into the higher unitary Self of Osiris, or *Anima mundi*.

This passage through death, assimilation and reanimation constitutes the spiritual path of initiation before one's natural death and is the sacrificial journey towards the further unification of Osiris and Ra. A. K.

Coomaraswamy argues that liberation (and this notion stands against all the too naïve expectations of modern individualists) is for the gods, not for men: we must not suppose that "we" are the heroes of this cosmic drama. There is but One Hero, the supreme Principle, or God, who "fetters himself by himself like a bird in the net" and then "breaks out of the snare".[9]

This is the rite performed by the supreme Principle, and all other "rites" within the realm of Heka-manifestations follow this pattern of "forgetfulness" and "recollection" on different levels of being. Therefore to "rationalize" our conduct, as A. K. Coomaraswamy pointed out, means to refer our activities to their noetic archetypes:

"If we cannot give a true account (*ratio, logos*) of ourselves and our doings it will mean that our actions have been 'as you like it' (*vrtha*), reckless (*asamkhyanam*) and informal (*apratirupam*) rather than to the point (*sadhu*) and in good form (*pratirupam*)."[10]

Our "rationality" stems from the intelligible pattern exposed by the self-revelation or self-disclosure of God, who, in the form of noetic plenitude, emerges from his own ineffable essential darkness.

5. Mummification and Dialectic

The Egyptian rites of embalming and mummification are based on the symbolic metaphysics of dismemberment and reconstitution of unity, which is inherited as an esoteric Orphic myth of Dionysus and the Titans in the Neoplatonic tradition.

"Why are the Titans said to plot against Dionysus?"- asks Damascius. "Because they initiate a mode of creation that does not remain within the bounds of the multiform continuity of Dionysus" (*In Phaed.* I.5).

Since men are created from the fragments of the Titans, "the Titanic mode of life is the irrational mode (*hoti he titanike zoe alogos estin*), by which rational life is torn asunder (ibid. I.9). Through it we fragment the Dionysus (Osiris) in ourselves, thus becoming similar to Titans (the followers of Seth), "but when we recover that lost unity, we become Dionysus and we attain what can be truly called completeness" (ibid. I.9).

The rejoining of the limbs of Dionysus, or Osiris, is the prototype of overcoming death that also provides the mythical precedent for embalming conducted by Anubis, the initiator into the mysteries aimed at the restoration of life to the body at the psychic level of *mundus imaginalis*. Dismemberment symbolizes the irrational disintegration of the human being who now needs to be reunited and elevated to the realm of *akh*, or *nous*. Therefore the embalming process repeats the rites and inner experiences of initiation: the corpse is transformed into the icon of a new alchemical body, built up beyond the realm of physical existence.

The word *sah* means not only mummy, but also dignity, nobility, and the state of spiritual enlightenment which itself is invisible and is only symbolized by the material *sah*, filled with *heka* powers and placed into the coffin, i.e., into the body of the sky goddess Nut, the soul's celestial mother. According to esoteric hermeneutics, the "placing of the *sah* in the coffin" is tantamount to the ascent of the deceased (of his winged *ba*) to the heavens and return to the winged daughter of Shu and Tefnut.

Through the body of Nut, divided into twelve hours of night and twelve hours of day, Ra himself travels. The goddess Nut swallows him as the evening sun and gives birth to him as the morning sun, the golden Scarab. While speaking about demiurgic Intellect (Ra) which contains pluralities in unity, divisible things undivided, and the Soul (Osiris) that first separates those contents which exist there in perfect unity, Proclus argues:

"This is why the theologians say that at the dismemberment of Dionysus his intellect was preserved undivided through the foresight of Athena and this soul was the first to be divided, and certainly the division into seven is proper primarily to Soul. It is therefore appropriate that Soul should have the function of division and of seeing things discursively. It is no wonder, then, that whereas the divine Forms exist primordially together and unified in the demiurgic Intellect, our soul attacks them separately… And so it is no wonder, as I said, that dialectic questions and answers approach different forms at different times… for spoken discourse breaks apart the single unitary thought" (*In Parm.*808-809).

It seems that dialectic, like geometry, is a pursuit belonging to the Osirian realm: dialectic concerns divided multiplicity, but, finally, through the certainty that it establishes, leads to the Forms. In this sense, a dialectician may be equated to a Sufi *siddiq*, the sincere devotee whose soul is filled with light by God.

Ultimately, Neoplatonic dialectic follows the anagogic patterns, already presented in the *Pyramid Texts*. The initiatory ascent to heaven concerns the inner realities of the heart-intellect, symbolized by sensible images. Therefore the methods of dialectic should be regarded as rationally developed, reinterpreted, and transformed methods and procedures of sacred rites, including those of the royal coronation. The dialectical ascent and assimilation with divine realities (*apotheosis*) is like the initiatory ascent of the king "to heaven as a divine falcon" in order to contemplate "this sacred image in heaven."

This elevation (as a part of the royal coronation rite) furnishes the initiate with *akh*-power of Ra and his Uraeus, thereby making the initiate familiar with "the wisdom of the gods like Horus". If rendered into rational philosophical discourse, this elevation means an ascent to the Forms through dialectical exercises and purification of the soul, aspiring to communion with Intellect and the One. The royal way to immortalization is that of the philosophical life, as opposed to the tyranny of one's lower mortal nature. According to Proclus:

"Tyranny is taken as a symbol of the life of becoming… the earth-born or Gigantic life. The true warfare with the Giants takes place in souls: whenever reason and intellect rule in them, the gods of the Olympians and Athena prevail, and the entire life is kingly and philosophical" (*In Parm*.692).

The philosopher, who is "winged" (*epteromenos*) like the Egyptian *ba* and separated from the lower inclinations, practises dialectic, defined by Plotinus as "the *logos* which can speak about everything in a reasoned and orderly way" (*Enn.* I.3.4.1-2).

Dialectic investigates existent things that are real (*ta onta*) and non-existent things (*ta me onta*), discusses good and not good, what is eternal and what is not eternal. It stops wandering about the world of sense and settles down in the realm of intellect, feeding the soul in what Plato calls "the plain of truth" (*Phaedr.*248b), where the soul finds its true food. Seeking scientific knowledge (*episteme*) of everything, dialectic uses the method of division to distinguish the Forms and to determine the essential nature of each thing (*Enn.* I.3.4.5-14).

Regarded as the supreme science (which has close analogies in all kinds of ancient metaphysics expressed in sacrificial and mythological discourse), dialectic is able to distinguish between appearance and reality, multiplicity and unity, various levels of being and gradations of form. It shows concern for "rationality" (which otherwise may be darkened and diminished), as Egyptian temple rites are concerned with the constant keeping of *maat* (truth and order), the solar "rationality", against the threat of *isefet*, irrationality, disorder, and darkness.

Therefore dialectic may be regarded as a well ordered rite of thought: it is efficacious and real to the extent that it is ritualized according to the intelligible patterns and rules of logic. It approaches "real beings" (*ta onta*) methodically, and the same strictly methodical approach characterizes hieratic rituals and sacrificial procedures. The method of dialectic consists in seeing similarities and differences that are related back to unity.

6. Musicians, Lovers and Philosophers

The concept of love is included in the very definition of philosophy. In this respect, one should observe that musicians of the Egyptian goddess Hathor are "lovers" as well. They are viewed as the divine incarnations of the goddess and of her golden son Ihy, the Lord of Hearts and the splendid lotus flower beside his mother. Therefore the initiate, guided by Maat-Hathor (order and drunkenness, intellect and love), may ascend to the celestial *akhet* with Ihy, the deity of those music-makers who desire rebirth in the solar cycle.

Plotinus, however, makes a distinction between 1) the musician, whose interest in the beautiful is confined to his art, and 2) the lover, who perceives the beautiful first through his sense of sight (the most intellectual of all senses, which surpasses hearing, according to the Greeks) and then through contemplation of intelligible beauty is able to enter the garden of truth. The lover is still unaware of his own knowledge which can be revealed through the conjoined practices of dialectic and the contemplative life. Nevertheless, love can inflame and stir desire for transcendence, serving as the wing for the soul. Peter A. Kay says:

"The life of philosophy is, among other things, the gradual overcoming of the irrational by means of rationality; the lover, who is caught between the formal and material sides of being, must learn to make himself *form*..."[11]

Since love is not a pure rational principle, the lover is an image (*eikon*) of the philosopher, as the sensible world is an image of the noetic cosmos. Therefore the philosopher's task is to make proper use of his love for the passage to invisible noetic beauty. The philosopher stands for the hypostasis of *Nous* (Atum-Ra). For this reason he is praised and claimed to be "winged" already. It means that he is separated from the sensible realm of images and contemplates realities.

The practice of dialectic that he uses for ascent is a kind of spiritual *askesis,* directed by the spiritual master, and involves not simply a body of discursive knowledge, but the direct perception of noetic Forms by intellectual intuition, *noesis*, close to the Sufi *dhawq,* tasted knowledge. However, the highest point which dialectic is able to reach is the noetic realm, not the One itself.

The end of the dialectical journey is the solar barque of Ra, the unity of the intelligible circuit, thereby "attaining assimilation to God (*homoiosis theo*) through consciousness of the ultimate One-in-the-many, prior to the return to the One itself".[12] This is not the journey of the deceased, but of the living philosopher who is looking for archetypes by which sensible things can be measured, thus tracing them back to a higher level of unity. For this reason, Proclus makes a clear distinction between dialectic as the dialectical method (*epicheirematike*) of the Peripatetics and dialectic as the proper method of philosophy for the attainment of wisdom. This Platonic dialectic consists in purification and induces recollection of true reality (*In Parm.*989).

As J. P. Anton pointed out, "the purpose of dialectic is not *techne* but *sophia;* its aim is not production but recreation of ideal reality."[13] If rendered into the language of myth, this "recreation" may be called "rebirth". For Plotinus, it is the rediscovery of one's true self, or return to

Intellect (Ra) through the anagogic *paideia* which implies recollection and ensures "the flight of the alone to the alone".

The soul, which did not have realities themselves but impressions of them, "must bring the impressions (*hoi tupoi*) into accord with the true realities of which they are impressions" (*Enn.* I.2.4.23-25). This "bringing back" or leading on the upward path is the task of dialectic "which will take us up there where we must go" (*Enn.* I.3.1).

Plotinus describes the three kinds of men who could be acquainted with noetic realities or make the journey from image to archetype: the musician, the lover, and the philosopher. The musician (or the initiate of Hathor, who by rhythmical shaking of his sistrum, acrobatic dances and songs opens the path of renewal through the shining and beautiful Eye of Ra), and being sensitive to beauty of harmony and rhythm, is led upwards to the noetic structure of the primordial sound, the demiurgic *Logos.* The sensible music is measured by numbers (*arithmoi*) and is based on inner mathematical reality, therefore the musician finds the road of Beauty and is already intellectual (has an *akh* nature) but, as Plotinus maintains, is not conscious of his own intellectuality and needs philosophical guidance.

The Plotinian lover can reach a higher stage in the ascent. When the musician's soul is enkindled by *eros* for intelligible beauty, it becomes a lover able to turn away from temporal images towards the noetic Forms that generate and permeate those images.

The Egyptian attitude is more integral and complex. Hathor, as the divine *shakti* of Horus, plays a part in the mysteries of the sun-barque and initiates ascent to the sky. The New Kingdom solar hymns are "aimed to help the tomb owners join Ra in his nocturnal descent and become absorbed into his great daily rhythm – his death and rebirth and his eternal return".[14] The ritual accomplishment, *telesiourgia,* is never separated from contemplation and from a certain kind of *noesis.*

7. Divine Knowledge and Theurgic Prayers

The Egyptian initiate, who knows the "mysterious representations" depicted in the *Amduat*, is "a well-provided *akh*", being "a holy god in the following of Thoth". To know and to be is the same. "He who knows" is equivalent to the Plotinian "philosopher" in whose soul all images have coalesced with their archetypes, thereby confirming 1) the complex unity of Intellect, and 2) the identity of the knower, his knowing, and what he knows. He who knows

> "Goes forth in the daytime (i.e., the noetic light)…
> Descends into the realm of the dead…
> Is a well provided *akh*-soul".[15]

According to J. Assmann, who regards the formulation of knowledge related to the transition and ascent as a science of its own (which reflects the typical bureaucratic and systematic style of Egyptian daily life):

"The accumulation of such an enormous body of knowledge based on pure speculation and meant to ensure individual salvation (i.e. in the sense of overcoming death) reminds one of the Gnosis and most surely represents one of its roots. Purity in the sense of deliverance from the burdens of earthly existence, may only be attained through knowledge. Purity and knowledge, these two concepts are closely interwoven; does not the deceased assert: I know the names… I am pure?"[16]

This knowledge constitutes the ladder of ascent to solar Intellect, making the eternal dimension of the noetic realm accessible to the soul so that it may "come forth as a god". It helps the soul to reach the divine abode of eternal life where Maat dwells, i.e., the Platonic "plain of truth" where it is fed by intelligible food. This is the path of Plotinian dialectic leading upwards to Intellect, the cosmological ladder "on which the Forms descend from and ascend to the throne of the King." [17]

As contemplation (*theoria*) ascends from nature to soul, and soul to intellect, the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject, because in intellect both are one, not by becoming akin, as in the best soul, but substantially, according to Plotinus. The Egyptian gods are beseeched to recognize the soul ascending to Ra:

"Be not unaware of me, O God;
If you know me, I will know you…
Be not unaware of me, O Ra;
If you know me, I will know you.
Be not unaware of me, O Thoth;
If you know me, I will know you" (*PT* 262).

The ascending path is the path of *gnosis*, of the divine names, because knowing and being are the same. It consists of dialectical interrogations, cross-examinations with predetermined questions and answers, proclamations of one's true identity. By knowing the secret names of the gods, the initiate (himself being in the blessed state of *maa-kheru*) is able to build up a "mystical ship", an imaginary *ochema*. This is accomplished by the sole means of mystical language which consists of names belonging to the intelligible realm. The "names" are regarded as noumena of things. Therefore, according to *Aitareya Aranyaka* (II.1.6), speech (*vac*) is the cord, and names (*namani*) the knots whereby all things are bound.

The Egyptian symbolism of the ship or barque (*wia*) is analogous to the Upanishadic and Platonic symbolism of the chariot (*ratha*, *harma*). The gods are travelling in papyrus boats with cabins or in the ceremonial barques used for cultic purposes. A shrine holding the god's image stood where the cabin was usually located; and the head of the deity set upon a collar often surmounted the prow and stern of the boat. God (*neter*), the divine henad, or the supreme Self, symbolically embodied in the sacred statue, is the passenger to whom the vehicle belongs; and all intelligible powers constitute its crew. Likewise in the Vedic *devavidya,* the intelligences or element-beings that constitute the psychic personality, are the names of the solar Principle, considered as Breaths (*pranah*), Gods (*devah*), Fires (*agnayah*), Faculties (*indriyani*) of the immanent solar Atman, Brahma, Indra, or Vayu. Strictly speaking, they are not human powers, but only names of Brahma's activities.[18]

The sacramental hermeneutics of the Egyptian priests transpose the individual parts of the initiate into the *akh*-realm: this deification of the limbs consists in equating each part of the body with a deity. In the dialectical drama of the otherworldly journey the deceased through his correct answers to the anonymous interrogator (a kind of "divine Socrates") must prove himself a god. The sharing of the divine nourishment (the sacramental food of truth, symbolized by all earthly offerings that ought to be elevated and reduced to their divine archetypes) makes the deceased, or the initiated "dialectician", a member of the community of gods. Wisdom of Thoth is an intellectual and sacramental activity which turns away from things below to their divine paradigms, the golden Forms, leading the soul to the sun-barque and union with Ra by means of recollection (*anamnesis*) and knowledge of the divine names, that is, by means of *dhikr*: theurgic invocation and remembrance.

Becoming like God is the ultimate end of the love of wisdom (*philosophia*) and the goal of its best part – the science of dialectic. Possessed of dialectical wisdom, the philosopher, according to Plotinus, is able to go up to the higher world, away from multiplicity. The final union, however, transcends the intellectual ability of philosophy and dialectic, because the unification of Intellect with the One is not a state (*stasis*) but a "state-outside" (*ekstasis*), and the attainment of it is for those who are already united with Ra.

At first we must "strip off what we put on in our descent", just as those who "go up to the celebrations of sacred rites" (*hoion epi ta hagia ton hieron*), are purified and strip off the clothes they wore before, going up naked, until passing in the ascent all that is alien to the God, they see the simple, single, and pure Principle, "from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think" (*Enn.* I.6.7.5-13).

According to Iamblichus, who returned to the ancient theurgic perspective, *theoria* is insufficient for the ascent which is accomplished not through philosophy, but through the work of the god (*to tou theou ergon*). However, the philosopher's thought itself may be regarded as "the work of the god", even if he, as a human being, is still unable to realize it. In fact, *theourgia* and *theoria* are the same. Iamblichus, discussing the workings of those theurgic rituals, invocations (*kleseis*) and illuminations that summon the souls upwards, says:

"It is evident from this work (*ton ergon*) that what we are now describing is the salvation of the soul. For in contemplation of the blessed sights (*theorein ta makaria theamata*) the soul achieves another life and enacts a new activity. It is no longer considered human… The ascent through invocations (*he dia ton kleseon anodos*) imparts to the priests purification from passions, a liberation from the realm of generation, and a union with the divine Principle" (*henosin te pros ten theian archen: De myster.*41.12-42.1).

The actualization of "another" intellectual life through illumination willingly sent by the gods does not simply mean that theurgical ritual has replaced contemplation, because *theoria* may also be regarded as a direct or indirect working of the gods. The sacred rites are inseparable from the ontology of the Forms and from intellection (*noesis*), aimed at intellectual truth (*noera aletheia*).

If the basis of theurgy is a certain "leading of light" (*photos agoge*), and this light-leading may be revealed in many forms, the rational soul (though unaffected by the divine light in particular theurgic rites, according to Iamblichus), nevertheless, is fully involved into the global schema of "divine workings", because some theurgic operations are intellectual. J. Finamore explains this distinction by introducing a notion of the higher theurgy which concerns the rational soul:

"Just as the vehicle (the seat of images) is united with the gods through its capacity to take on divine images, so the rational soul is united with the gods through its intellectual capacity".[19]

Mystical prayers (like the Sufi *dhikr Allah*), themselves regarded as *sunthemata* of the gods, are "intellectual powers" that bring about the union with the gods. The divine breath (*pneuma*), which descends and enters the initiate, or "the presence of the fire of the gods and some ineffable form of light" (*parousia tou ton theon puros kai photos ti eidos arrheton: De myster.*113.8-9), are such that they cover the initiate completely in a circle and he is unable to use any of his own powers.

According to J. Finamore, this divine fire is an illumination, emanating from the god's eternal vehicle to the initiate's ethereal vehicle, which has already been purified, emptied of its own images, and made fit to receive those luminous images imparted from the god. When the initiate's *ochema* is filled with images coming from the deity, this image-making faculty is taken over wholly, but the rational soul is unaffected and still functions.[20] This illumination means that the soul's vehicle (the microcosmic solar boat) begins its ascent to the god's vehicle (the macrocosmic solar boat).

But the rational soul is led to union by "the intellectual power contained in the words". G. Shaw describes them as "intermediate *sunthemata*", the names of the gods, *onomata*, which are "individual theophanies" in the same way that the cosmos is the "universal theophany".[21] What does it mean to be "intellectual" in this Neoplatonic context? Surely it refers to the fact that our *logos* has its source directly in *nous* and this is the reason why the theurgist in his invocations and mantric incantations of the *asema onomata* is assimilated to the Demiurge (at the same time preserving his mortal corporeal part) and why the dialectician or the initiate of the mathematical mysteries (*mathematikoi orgiasmoi*) achieve the same assimilation to Intellect.

8. Intellect as the Spirit of Light

According to the Later Neoplatonists, intellective Intellect covers all those creatures to which the Demiurge gives *eidos*, form, but all that soul has in extension, intellect contains in an unextended manner. Therefore the contemplation of our microcosmic intellect is "objective" and that of the soul "subjective". However, the Forms contemplated are not all on the same level of being, but constitute numerous levels. As Proclus explains:

"Every intellect contemplates directly itself (*nous heauton noei*); but the primal Intellect contemplates itself only... Each subsequent intellect contemplates simultaneously both itself and its priors, so that its object is itself and its source" (*ET* 167).

The pure intelligible is distinct from the intelligible in the thinker. This is an intelligible object of thought (*noeton*) in intellect, and an intellect in *noeton*. But the higher intellect is identical with its object (*toi noetoi ho autos*), whereas the lower is identical with its own content, not with the higher intelligible. Therefore Proclus argues that the transcendent Forms exist by themselves (*kath' auta*): they are not in us, and what is not in us is not coordinate with our knowledge (*episteme*) but is unknowable (*agnosta*) to our knowledge, being contemplated only by the divine Intellect:

"This is so for all the Forms, but especially for those that are beyond (*ep'ekeina*) the intellective gods; for neither sense-perception, nor knowledge based on opinion, nor pure reason (*logos*), nor our own intellective knowledge connects the soul to those Forms, but only an illumination (*ellampsis*) from the intellective gods renders us capable of being connected to those intelligible-and-intellective Forms... And for this reason, indeed, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (249d)... compares their contemplation (*theorian*) to mystery-rites (*teletais*), initiations (*muesesi*) and visions (*epopteias*), elevating our soul under the arch of Heaven, and to Heaven itself, and to the place above Heaven" (*In Parm.*949.13-38).

Philosophical ascent is analogous to that accomplished by the mystery-rites. And philosophy itself essentially is a rite of rebirth – "rebirth" meaning the soul's unification with divine Intellect, symbolized by Helios (who coincides with Dionysus, thereby becoming Ra-Osiris), the all powerful light of the cosmos, flaming with gold.

According to the Orphic teachings, which imitate Egyptian theological paradigms, all gods and, in certain respects, all things are manifestations of a single deity with all its powers. This is the king Amun-Ra who has hidden himself as Amun, and has distanced himself in his embodiment as sun:

> "Tanen, who elevates himself above the gods:
> The self-rejuvenating old one who traverses *neheh*,
> Amun, who abides in all things" (*Pap. Mag. Harris* III.10-IV.8).

As the Bes with seven heads he embodies the *bau* of Amun-Ra and "keeps his name mysterious before the gods, the giant of a million cubits". In the Orphic cosmogony, from the primeval water, the beginning of everything, mud was formed and from these a dragon that had on it a lion's head and a bull's head, and in between the face of a god. This all-seeing Eye is the good spirit of light, Agathos Daimon, since *drakon* was believed to be derived from *derkein*, "to see".

This spirit of light, Agathos Daimon, was called Heracles and Chronos, since Heracles, according to an Orphic etymology, means the coiling serpent: *drakon heliktos*. The serpent-like Heracles gave birth to an enormous Egg which contained male and female nature and all the many seeds, or archetypes, along with the biform god with golden wings, namely, Phanes, who combined in himself all the gods and cosmic powers, having two faces, one in front and one behind. The name of Phanes is usually derived from *phos* and *phaneros*, that is, from "light" and "illumination".

Phanes-Helios, stretched like a radiant ribbon (the sphere of the sun) is depicted as a celestial serpent and is the universal god Pan (or Bes), moving the whole cosmos in harmony and manifesting itself in all cyclical changes (or cosmic rituals), including the cycle of the seasons with their changing winds, of succeeding days and nights. This Phanes-Helios-Dionysus (Amun-Ra-Osiris) is the light and life of the cosmos, for, according to Orphic theology, the winds engender life and the soul is borne by the winds (breaths of Shu) from the noetic solar realm into man.

The upper half of the burst cosmic Egg constitutes the heavens, surrounded by the fire of life bursting from the Egg and the coils of the sun serpent. Here, according to H. Leisegang, dwell those initiates cloaked in flames, who have attained the supercelestial region (*huperouranios topos*) in the course of the mystery rite, or "the upper way" (*hodos ano*).[22] They enter the fiery circuit of the solar barque, being "radiant in Light land", in the Land of Enduring: their hands are taken by the *bau* of Heliopolis and grasped by Ra, their heads are lifted by the two Enneads (*PT* 532).

How have the *bau* of initiates risen to this supercelestial place, equated to the back of Heaven (the back of Nut) by Plato? H. Leisegang says that this is achieved either after departing from the body in death, or in the ecstasy of their mystery cult, re-enacted in ritual, for all mystical experiences and the corresponding myths are represented in a ritual by the initiates themselves:[23]

"Whether we have to do with 1) a cult ritual, with 2) an actual ascension of the soul, or with 3) the inward ascent of the soul to God – all three show the same structure".[24]

The soaring of the soul to Heaven and beyond it is the symbolic expression of an inner process taking place in the soul, able to gaze into the infinite plenitude of light and contemplate the spiritual world of Ideas.

According to Iamblichus, the intellectual interpretation (*noera diermeneusis*) of the symbols, practised by the Egyptians, leaves behind the impressions (*eidolon*) of the images (*phantasiai*), thus rising to intellectual truth (*noera aletheia: De myster.*250.13-17). This is the Egyptian way of contemplation, interpretation of symbols, and theurgic rites, thereby moving from images to their intelligible archetypes, from the workings of the soul's imaginative and irrational faculties to Intellect itself. But the images may be manifested on different levels of reality, being revealed in one particular ontological domain while remaining hidden in another. For example, the Egyptian term *seshem* mostly stands for a psychic image in the realm of Duat (or in the human *phantasia*), in contrast to a physical image, actually placed in the tomb. The term *seshem* is closely related to the hidden Amun whose *bau* are revealed through the secret images (*seshemu*).

9. The Osirian Initiation and Separation from the Mortal Body

"The *nous* in each one is god for man", according to Euripides (fr.839.12), who is fascinated by the idea that human intellect is a part of the deity. W. Burkert regards this thought as "revolutionary" and relates to "the most striking thesis" which asserts that the well ordered arrangement of things in the cosmos proves the existence of a guiding providence (*pronoia*), of divine Intellect that moves everything.[25]

The immortality of the soul, once taught as an esoteric doctrine of the mysteries, becomes explicit through early Hellenic philosophy. At death, the body (itself being like earth) falls into the earth, but the soul returns to the *aither*, the noetic light or fire. However, this Orphico-Pythagorean and Pre-Socratic theology is revolutionary only for the Greeks themselves, because teachings of the soul's immortality, heart-intellect (*nous*) and providence clearly stem from much older Egyptian sources. W. Burkert himself is compelled to recognize striking parallels between the Egyptian

Book of the Dead and certain motifs introduced by Orphic mythology, still further elaborated by the Pythagoreans and Plato:[26]

"This is in sharp contrast to the official, Homeric conception of the immortal gods. To what extent this myth and indeed the very cult of chthonic Dionysus and the beliefs in blessedness and punishments in the nether world depended on the Egyptian Osiris cult from the start remains at least a question that must be seriously asked".[27]

When the Greek epigram to those who fell in war in 432 B.C. "boldly" states: "The *aither* has received the souls, earth the bodies", this is simply a repetition of what had already been said in the *Pyramid Texts* two thousand years before: soul (*ba*) to heaven, corpse (*shat*) to earth (*PT* 305).

For Egyptians, the body taken as a whole lacked the ensouling powers which imparted life (*ankh*) to the limbs; therefore only the body as a whole, called "corpse" (*khat, shat*) returned to the earth. The external and internal organs were regarded as the ensouled parts, governed by different life-giving deities and infused with their qualities. This buried body, *khat,* is analogous to the Greek *soma,* initially never used with reference to the living being, only to the corpse which resembled the de-animated statue. The living body is not *soma* or *khat* at all, but rather a composition of members (*kau*), each serving as a physical vehicle of psychic and spiritual qualities that can exist separately (on the higher ontological level) and, therefore, are regarded as not belonging to the material frame – the physical *khat*, liable to decay, and the mummified body in the tomb.

Since each member of the animated body-structure is a bearer of the different divine *eidos* and the related psychic power, J. Naydler supposes that the initiatory ordeal of dismemberment (before ascending "on the smoke of the great censing") leads to a higher degree of psychophysical integration and a unitary self-consciousness, otherwise inaccessible to the member-based *psuche:*

"It was only through initiation or after physical death that a more unified self-consciousness such as we experience today could arise, as a counterpart to which the body was experienced 'from outside' as a unity".[28]

However, the author apparently falls into a grave mistake in his treating of "the modern post-Cartesian, dualistic experience of a unified inner self-consciousness" as the esoteric goal of the Osirian initiation. This evolutionary picture presents Cartesian dualism as a desired goal of which only the initiates could dream and teach in their "secret doctrines", simply because the *ba,* for the Egyptians, was always a disembodied soul and its separation from the body was a fundamental initiatory experience, still echoed in Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy.

Be that as it may, the Egyptian doctrine of *ba,* defined as an immortal soul and out-of-body state, proved to be crucial for the early Hellenic philosophy, especially Platonism. Through the priestly initiation (death before an actual physical death) *ba* is detached from the mortal body and ascends to the realm of *akh* so as to be united with divine Intellect. This metaphysical pattern based on the theory of 1) divine archetypes and their images, 2) noetic immortality, 3) education and transformation of the soul, and 4) its ascent through knowledge (*episteme, gnosis, anamnesis*), and *praxis* (*askesis, theoria)*, became the main subject of philosophy.

Contrary to the *ka*-principle and vital energy which lead to an enhancement of the member-based psychology and which are bound to the tomb ("the place of *ka*"), out-of-body awareness (induced by spiritual exercises or spontaneously experienced at death) introduces the anagogic path of ascent, that is, of return to the Imperishable Stars. This out-of-body awareness is symbolized by the human-headed falcon.

When the *ba* leaves the lifeless body and rises up, man sees his members disintegrated and must detach his consciousness from the lower psychosomatic structure and its most dear memories, in order to reconstruct his true divine identity, that is, to be transformed and reborn as an intelligible being of light. This liberation is the only thing that is important in our earthly existence and the most difficult to achieve.

The *ba*-experience of looking at one's body as if from an outside viewpoint was essential for the Osirian initiation and recollection of one's spiritual Self. This separation from the mortal body is equated to the entering into a temple, into the holiest part of it, ruled by Osiris, the unified royal archetype of the image-like deceased. The path of the deceased (Osiris) to the universal Osiris (the Greek Dionysus) enthroned in the seventh of seven halls, corresponds to the path of the priest on his way to the holy of holies. This path may be further interpreted as an ascent and assimilation to the deity. Death, as the first step in passing a threshold of the Osirian temple, is the main task of philosophical initiation which stems from the ancient mysteries.

According to Plato, so long as we adhere to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our attaining to a vision of the true intelligible realities, let alone union with them. The body fills us with loves, desires, fears, and all sorts of fancies. In order to have pure knowledge we must separate ourselves from the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. Hence, "the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable only when we are dead" (*Phaed.*66c).

However, the realization of one's noetic consciousness (*akh*-identity) involves a newfound awareness of a spiritual body (*sah, sahu*), which serves as a vehicle of the initiate's intellect. During transformation (death and rebirth), one's corporeal members are transmuted by Osirian alchemy and knowledge of Anubis, germinating into the golden spiritual body, the intelligible *eidos*. This transformation or "changing into" (*iret kheperu em*) does not refer to any actual (literally understood) rebirth on earth, but belongs to an intermediate state between life and death, comparable to the *bardo* state in the Tibetan books of liberation.

According to W. Federn, this philosophical transformation and identification limb by limb with the noetic pantheon takes place through an inner experience and *heka* powers. It is meant to be performed primarily by the living. Its aim is to prepare the initiate for his death and actually transforms him through the *samadhi*-like experience.[29]

The Sanskrit term *samadhi* literally means "synthesis" (*sam-a-dha*: to put together, mend, heal) and is an opposite to *vyadhi* – "analysis" (*vi-a-dha*: to divide up, disintegrate). These terms may be understood also in the sense of health and illness, of unity and diversity respectively. Inasmuch as man's various selves or different members are unified (*samahitah*) in the heart-intellect, itself identified with Brahma (Atum-Ra), one realizes the state of spiritual integration instead of estrangement from the Self (represented by the dismembering of Osiris).[30]

10. Resurrection of the Golden Phoenix

Transformations in the realm of Duat (*'alam al-mithal, barzakh* of the Sufis), such as "changing into any form" or "into any god" one wants, may be viewed as particular spiritual exercises and gnostic experiences. When this hypothesis is established and accepted, we should understand better the mysterious inscriptions in the XVIII Dynasty tombs, analyzed by W. Federn, for example: Why the phrase "May he undergo his transformations as he likes" can be paired with "May he follow his heart in his tomb" or "In order that he may follow his heart in his garden".[31]

The expression "following one's heart" (*shems-ib*, or *shems-ab*) probably denotes the *bios theoretikos*, contemplative way of life, and may be rendered in Greek as *scholazein*, to have leisure, to be at leisure. This happiness-engendering contemplation "in the garden" implies the transformation of consciousness, restoration of the primordial "golden state", and assimilation with various divine names or "faces" of the deity, thereby mystically changing one's identity and turning all images back to their solar archetypes. This "re-membering" experience finally transforms the *ba* into the *akh*, carried by the spiritual body of light which is germinated when Ra calls the initiate to breathe the divine air. Ultimately, the initiate is turned into Atum-Ra himself, whose assembled limbs represent the company of the gods and the noetic paradigms. Thereby liberation from the Osirian realm (Duat) and the tomb is achieved.

The transformation and turning into a falcon of gold is sometimes depicted as a result of a passage through fire. The concept of purification and divinization involved an alchemical transformation of bodily members into gold or precious stones that symbolize and actually represent the primordial divine substance. Thus, according to the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, the power of the true staff of Hermes (i.e., of the true philosophy) lies in the fact that it changes all that it touches into gold.[32]

The "lifting up of the veil" and meeting with Gold (Hathor), who initiates the soul into a new shining existence at dawn in *akhet*, means that the goddess behind her veil is "none other than divine Reality in which the objective and the subjective coincide".[33] The veil is the cosmogonic projection by which the divine Being is bipolarized and which introduces the play of innumerable "mirrors". However, both veiling and unveiling, descent and ascent depend on the serpent power of Tefnut-Sekhmet-Hathor, the Egyptian Mahashakti. Egyptian thought, both in its essence and particular metaphysical symbolism, is close to that of Indian. Deba Brata Sen Sharma says:

"The manifestation of the universe is thus only a mode of his (the Supreme Lord's) self-revelation in which he utilizes no other material than his own Shakti. Or to put it in perhaps a more precise language, the Supreme Lord's self-manifestation as the universe is only a self-expansion in the aspect of Shakti (*sva-shakti-spharau*). As such, the manifestation of the universe symbolizes his divine glory (*aishvarya*), in the revelation of which the Shakti plays the most important role".[34]

The Egyptian initiate is reborn as the scarab Khepera emerging from the top of the staff between a pair of horns called *wpt*, "summit of the skull". To open the skull in order to release the reborn is the same as to open the tomb, since the staff (like the caduceus of Hermes, able to change all into gold), is equivalent to the sacred tree (Hathor-Nut), the spinal *djed* column (Osiris), and the standing mummy – "the mound of Sokar". In "the secret darkness" of this mound, the scarab's egg is transformed into a worm. The new germ of divine life appears only after leaving the Osirian mummy-form within which the golden bird is brooding as in the Vase of Hermes (*kerotakes*), or in the Vase of the Philosophers Stone, shaped like an egg with an enclosing serpent, in which the Stone was held to be prepared.

Following an archetypal way of Ra-Khepera, the initiate (the dead man) emerges from the Snake, the spinal column at the top of the skull and is "reborn" as the imperishible *akh* carried by the immaterial golden body of light. The word *sa*, which means the back of the spine, is homonymous with the similar word *sa*, which means protection, amulet, *sunthema*. The *sa* sign is often joined with the *ankh* (life) and the royal *djed* pillar which represented both solar rebirth and the establishment of stability in the cosmos (the ultimate victory of Osiris over Seth).

J. Lindsay maintains that there is a direct line of tradition from the initiation-ritual of sky-ascent and the underworld descent to the alchemical initiation-ritual of god-revelation and transformation in body-spirit.[35] T. Burckhardt traces alchemy back to the priestly art of the ancient Egyptians and says:

"That there is an inward gold, or rather, that gold has an inward as well as an outward reality, was only logical for the contemplative way of looking at things, which spontaneously recognized the same 'essence' in both gold and the sun. It is here, and nowhere else, that the root of alchemy lies".[36]

The early Christian civilization inherited an alchemical imagery which was used to express the emerging theological conceptions of death and rebirth. The redeeming and transforming spirit is often likened to fire, analogous to the Flame of Uraeus, the Eye of Ra, whose creative activity is described as "cooking". Therefore Ambrose, dealing with the myth of the Phoenix, initially the *Bennu* bird of Heliopolitan cosmogony, says:

"Then when the clay of our flesh… has been cooked by the fire into a vessel (*testa*) so that this flesh, previously pressed down to the earth by a heavy burden, may with the aid of angels fly away towards heaven after receiving the wings of spiritual grace, it has here eternity as a genuine and appeasing pledge for its safety".[37]

In the Hellenistic mythologies and scientific accounts, the Phoenix bird is related to the myrrh and frankincense produced by the alchemical force of the sun's fire in the driest and hottest parts of the world, less liable to putrefaction (*sepsis*) and, therefore, sweet-smelling. As the symbol of rebirth, the Phoenix is closely associated with the sun's course and those who lived in the Golden Age: he subsists on supernatural foods and produces no excrement (or his excrement is transformed into perfumes).

The decline of the Phoenix, according to M. Detienne, is its reduction to the status of the bat. For Neoplatonists, bats represent souls carried down to the shadows, since their wings are made heavy by the flesh (Proclus *In Remp.* I.120.5-10). Only the perfumed flame of spices on the sacrificial pyre may restore the original "golden" state of the Phoenix.[38]

For the early Christians, the worshipper is baked in a pot by baptism, and hardened by fire into a new birth, like the solar bird on the Heliopolitan altar, that is, in the nest of frankincense and myrrh. According to the Egyptian cosmogonies of an alchemical type and to texts of initiation, those seeking to know the mysteries of regeneration in the Osirian Duat must know the nature of *ba* and all its transformations accomplished by the immanent fire of Hathor-Sekhmet. By entering the flames of destruction and passing through the fierce heat of transformation (the ecpyrosis which destroys the "man" within us) the initiate is reborn into new life.

This life-bringing destruction is at first accompanied by tears and grief for the rotted corpse of mortal personality, since humankind (*rmt*) arises from the tears (*rmjt*) of Ra and is bound to the corruptible realm which must be destroyed. The Egyptian term for "kindling light" or "setting fire" (*stj*) is related to the verb "impregnate" (*stj*) and this complicated mixture of mourning, destruction of enemies (mortality) and fiery generation of child (immortality) is depicted in the sixth hour section of the *Book of the Night* on the sarcophagus chamber of the Osireion at Abydos and in the tomb of Ramesses VI (1144-1136 B.C.).

The Christians also regarded the resurrected body as a golden statue, purified in the fire. By plunging into fire (spirit) and water, the "lead" of the flesh is to be transformed into spiritual "gold". The purifying pool of flames resembles the Lake of Fire in the Egyptian Duat filled with burning water and presided over by the four Thothian baboons, one at each corner. This rectangular mandala-like Lake cuts out all that is impure in the soul; therefore, if the *ba* enters it being impure and still identified with its mortal shell or some "psychic remains", it will suffer torment and fall down among the knives, as if being hacked to pieces.

To the pure initiate, this falsehood-destroying fire appears as the light of Ra, because at the level of noetic archetypes this Lake is regarded as the Isle of Fire or the fiery lotus flower infused with Ra's intelligible presence. The waters of Nun surround the Isle of Fire, or Heliopolis, the birthplace of Atum (or the divine *ba* of Ra), irradiated and illuminated by the noetic fire of the self-created trinitarian Atum-Khepera-Ra. The close metaphysical relationship of fire and water is emphasized in an alchemical saying quoted by Proclus:

"All things are dissolved by fire and glued together by water" (*In Tim.* III.321-24).

The Athenian philosopher continues:

"For melting and welding are necessary for the production of things whose parts are like each other (*homoimeron*), the latter being provided by moisture and the former by heat; for everything (*to pan*) is melted down (*teketai*) by Fire and is glued together (*kollotai*) by Water" (*In Tim.* III.321.22-25).

L. Siorvanes regards this "melting" of Fire and the "glueing" of Water as the source of the famous alchemical formula *solve et coagula*, dissolve and solidify,[39] though Proclus and other Neoplatonists are themselves recipients and interpreters of various ancient cosmological traditions. It is well known that Osiris is identified with the waters of the Nile into which he died and from which he was revived, these psychic waters of death and rebirth being an image and prolongation of Nun at the level of *Anima mundi*. The later alchemists associated the tomb of Osiris (in which his members were hidden but the face was revealed) with *chemia* and mercury, connecting water with lead.

11. Two Ways of the *Amduat*

The corpse of Osiris lies in Rosetau, "at the boundary of the sky", locked "in darkness and surrounded by fire". According to the *Coffin Texts*, whoever gazes on the mummified Osiris cannot die (*CT* VII.302c). The desolate realm of Rosetau, the "Land of Sokar, who is on his sand", is regarded as a sandy landscape where the solar barque needs to be towed and is itself transformed into a fiery serpent. The *Book of the Hidden Chamber*, designated by the scholars as *Amduat*, locates this land, where Horus and Sokar look after the protecting and renewing solar Eye, in the dark fourth hour of the Sun's night journey.

The *Amduat* in its opening section promises *gnosis* to the initiate nine times and depicts how a ram-headed *ba* of Ra enters into the body of Nut, or the Osirian Duat, at the first hour of the night. F. Schuon, who regards man as a reduced image of the cosmogonic unfolding, says:

"On earth, the divine Sun is veiled; as a result the measures of things become relative, and man can take himself for what he is not, and things can appear to be what they are not; but once the veil is torn, at the time of that birth which we call death, the divine Sun appears; measures become absolute; beings and things become what they are and follow the ways of their true nature".[40]

The spiritual night journey ends with the initiate's rebirth in the morning, following the course of Ra through the twelve hours or sections of the goddess body. The texts and pictures of the *Amduat* constitute a unity: the representations are arranged in three registers, with the solar barque always depicted in the middle one. As E. F. Wente pointed out, in the *Book of Amduat* considerable stress is laid upon knowledge of the hidden realities, the netherworld beings and their activities.[41] Therefore this book may be regarded as "philosophical" and "gnostic" in the original sense of these words.

This knowledge of the hidden names (or intelligible forms) is "knowledge of the mysterious *bau*" (*rekh bau shetau*), which can be acquired by the initiate upon earth through the esoteric *paideia*. The *Book of Amduat* provides "knowledge of the *bau* that are in the Duat and their functions pertaining to what is in the hours (*unun*) in their secret names" (*renu-sen shetau: Long Amduat* 76.6-7). The book assures us that:

"The one who knows these secret designs (or mysterious images: *seshemu sheta*) is a well-equipped *akh*. He goes out and comes in within the Duat" (*Long Amduat* 45.4-5).

The gnostic is transformed through his knowledge. He is liberated from destructive irrational forces, mortality, and corruption:

"The one who knows it upon earth is one whose fluid the Fierce Faced One (i.e., the snake Apep) does not drink" (*Short Amduat* 297-300).

Further it is said that the gnostic who knows these words (*rekh medu pen*) is able to approach the hidden realities and Duat dwellers. However, this knowledge is esoteric and confined only to the initiates:

"This is drawn in such a manner in the hidden part of the Duat (*ament net duat*), being remote and hidden (*amen*) because of the selectivity of those who know it" (*Long Amduat* 12.2-3).

This knowledge is modelled on divine patterns and consists of secret words which the gods of Duat say to "this god" and which "this god" says to them, "this god" meaning the solar *ba* who passes the gates and sections of the Netherworld.

The *Book of Amduat* is concerned with instructions for drawing symbolic representations of what is in the Duat, and these pictures function as 1) meaningful signs and images of spiritual hermeneutics, 2) sacred icons for contemplation, and 3) theurgic *sunthemata*, imbued with transformative and anagogic divine powers. The *Long Amduat* version emphasizes "drawing", that is, the ritual practice of concentration on images (*seshemu*), or symbolic forms, presumably close to the Tantric meditations that include visualizations and drawings of various *yantras* and *pratimas*.

The sacred image grows out of the inner vision; therefore the visible material picture is a copy of the inner *seshem*, and its formal structure is based on the intelligible Idea. Moreover, it does possess an inexorably fixed order (no element may occupy a different location within the general framework) and is inseparable from the mantric words of power, *hekau*, or "divine speech" (*medu neter*). In this respect, the sacred image corresponds in form to the image of the deity in the heart and expresses the essence of divine powers visualized in meditations. The deity's form can be made up of a secret name, for the divine *ba* is present in its name to the same extent as it is present in cult statues and cosmic manifestations (*kheperu*). Likewise the *Kularnava Tantra* says that the *yantra* consists of mantras, for the god's form is mantric (*devata mantrarupini*). The same text proclaims:

"What the body is for the spark of life (*jiva*), what oil is for the lamp's light, that is what the *yantra* represents for all the gods… Each deity on his own seat, and each one with his own special yantra appropriate to it…" (*Kularnava Tantra* VI.86-90).

In this case, quasi-geometric *yantras* are analogous to hieroglyphs of Thoth: without the "consignment of breath" (*pranapratisthana*) breathed into them they are dead. This consignment of breath is the insertion into an image of the same divine power that animates the initiate. As H. Zimmer pointed out:

"Whoever worships a figurative sacred image brings before his inward eye the *shakti* animating him in precisely that manifestation through which he is accustomed to see the Divine, by virtue of his initiation…"[42]

The *Long Amduat* provides the following explanation of its sacred representations:

"This is drawn according to this *seshem* in the hidden place of the Duat (*amenet net duat*). The one who draws (*irer*, or *arer*) these representations (*seshemu*) is the likeness of the great god himself. It is useful for him upon earth" (*Long Amduat* 22.2-4).

The *Short Amduat* version is almost the same, but emphasizes *gnosis* instead of the execution of images, be they mental or sensible:

"This is drawn according to this *seshem* in the hidden place of the Duat. As for one who knows (*rekh*) these representations, [he is] the likeness of this great god himself…" (*Short Amduat* 12-14).

Both the drawing of these mysterious *seshemu* that serve for the *sumbolike theoria,* (i.e., for contemplation or interpretation), and the process of knowing them lead to assimilation with the deity, the living ram-headed *Ba* of the solar Intellect. Similarly, as the *yantra* is so called because it brings under control (*ni-yantrana*) all the evils stemming from errors and ignorance, so the drawings of the *Amduat,* visualized by an inner sight (the Eye of Horus) and executed, are regarded as useful for those initiates who "draw" them in all ontological realms: physical, psychic, and spiritual:

"This is drawn according to this *seshem* which is in outline upon the east of the hidden chamber of the Duat. It is useful for the *akh* who draws (*irer*) it – upon earth, in heaven, and inside the earth" (*Long Amduat* 193.6-7).

The *Short Amduat* supplies *rekh* (knowing) instead of making or drawing (*irer*). However, ritual *praxis* and *gnosis* are inseparable. For example, the mantric rituals of Isis (*hekau Aset*) for repelling the snake Apep from Ra, performed in the hidden part of the Duat and upon earth, may be regarded either as performed theurgic actions or as gnostic contemplations.

Both attitudes lead to the same truth: the initiate realizes the nucleus of the image as his own inmost essence. When the spell of ignorance is broken, he can pronounce: "I am Ra". Therefore he who performs (*irer*) these *hekau* rites, related to the visualized and drawn *seshemu*, and he who knows (*rekh*) them, are both "in the barque of Ra (*wia en Ra*) in the sky and in the earth (*em pet em ta*)". "In the sky" means in the noetic realm after the body's death, and "in the earth" – still living in the physical body like the *jivanmukta*. Only the selected initiates "can know (*rekh*) this *seshem* without the knowledge (*rekh*) of which the Fierce Faced One (the snake Apep) may not be repelled" (*Long Amduat* 123.2-5; *Short Amduat* 170-179). The snake Apep symbolizes the irrational forces of both personal and trans-personal subconscious darkness.

12. The Union of Osiris and Ra

The *ba* of Ra, standing within a *kar* type shrine in the solar barque and accompanied by other boats, is like a cult statue passing along the processional route: the axial succession of rooms with a series of doorways that had to be penetrated. The solar *ba* enters the cavern of Sokar between the two heads of the Aker-sphinx and the Lake of Fire below.

In the sixth hour of the night journey, depicted in the *Book of Amduat* and other afterlife books, the ram-headed *ba* reaches the water hole of Nun – the darkest point of the Duat where the mummified corpse of Ra lies. This corpse is actually turned into the symbolic icon representing Osiris-Sokar. When Ra and Osiris (as the solar *ba* and its innermost image depicted in the form of a scarab) unite at midnight, in the realm of Sobek and Nun, the new light is ignited through the Eye, now restored by Thoth who takes his seat in front of the solar barque.

In the next (seventh) hour, Apep, the serpent of non-being, is defeated and dismembered, while Ra and Osiris are in the coils of a protective *Mehen*-serpent. Atum itself is depicted on a serpent along with three human-headed and already divinized *bau*-birds.

In the tenth hour the *ba* of Sokar (the falcon in the serpent) and the *ba* of Osiris (the falcon-headed serpent) make their appearance in the front of the barque, and the motif of healing the Eye by Thoth and Sekhmet is again emphasized.

The actual rebirth of the noetic Sun (or the initiate's *akh*-intellect), modelled as an imitation of the original theogony, occurs only in the twelfth hour and is situated inside the serpent called "World-encircler". The solar procession passes through the body of this serpent from tail to mouth. E. Hornung argues that the backward direction indicates the necessary reversal of time:

"All these beings enter the serpent's tail old and frail, weakened by age, and emerge from its mouth as newborn babes. At the end of the hour, the solar beetle, which was already present in the bow of the barque, flies into the outstretched arms of Shu…"[43]

This motif of the backward direction is echoed in Plato's *Statesman:*

"Such resurrection of the dead was in keeping with the cosmic change, all creation being now turned in the reverse direction" (*Polit.*271b).

This philosophy of the "restored golden age" and of "training ourselves to give and understand a rational account of every thing" (ibid.286a) stems from solar eschatology and the "royal art" of spiritual rebirth. The soul is in intellect (*nous*), since intellect is the *arche* of the soul and through the fiery process of rebirth the soul becomes *nous*. The soul inhabits three realms: 1) the sensible world (*aisthetos kosmos*); 2) the intermediary Duat, or Heaven; 3) the intelligible world.

Though the call to separate soul from body is among the main metaphysical and ethical injunctions laid upon us by the Neoplatonists, this separation does not necessarily refer to the moment of death. The "philosophical separation" (analogous to that practised by the Egyptian royal priests and sages) is a stage towards the act of union with the intelligible realm, i.e., of "the coming forth into Day", the solar rebirth. Through sacred rites, contemplations and spiritual exercises (philosophical *praxis*) the soul may separate itself from the body before the body separates itself from the soul at this moment of physical death. The separation and ascent of the soul is accomplished during this life and means living the life of the inner man, turning to one's heart-intellect.

Since the lower activities of man are a mere by-product or an image of the higher divine Self (just as every *ba* is a lesser manifestation of the supreme divine *Ba*), the spiritual ascent implies that the lofty position of the disembodied and regenerated soul helps to govern, transform, and assimilate the mummy-like body which now reveals its luminous intelligible aspect. According to Porphyry, the constitution (*schesis*) of the body is retained in Hades through the stamping of an *eidolon* (image, *simulacrum*) on the *pneuma* by *phantasia* (*Sent.*32). He says that to be in Hades for the soul is

"to preside over an image whose nature is to be in a place, and to have an obscure hypostatic form of existence. That is why if the subterranean realm be a dark place, the soul, without separating from existence, descends into Hades when she attaches herself to some image. ...she impresses a form on the *pneuma* by the power of her imagination, and thus she acquires an image. The soul is said to be in Hades because the *pneuma* that surrounds her also happens to have a formless and obscure nature... This is not to imply that the essence of the soul changes place, or is in a locality, but acknowledges that she contacts the habits of the bodies whose nature it is to change location... Therefore, when in a condition of superior purity, she unites with a body that is close to immaterial nature, that is, an ethereal body. When she descends from the development of reason to imagination, she receives a solar body. If she... falls in love with forms, she puts on a lunar body" (*Sent.*32).[44]

The *Book of Gates* (employed in the Ramesside royal tombs), which emphasizes the "way of ritual" and speaks of knowledge only in relation of making offerings, nevertheless confirms that "those who know Ra" (*rekhyu Ra*) are initiates upon earth, though their *akhu* are already at the secluded place of the West. In this book, immediately before the sixth hour the Judgment of the Dead is depicted, an Ennead of justified initiates (*maakheru*) stand on the steps, while their lower irrational parts (the "enemies") are put into the Place of Annihilation. This justification is regarded as a necessary condition before the union of the solar *ba* and its Osirian image in the sixth hour of the night. The mummies of the initiates, or the deceased, are depicted as lying on a serpent-shaped bed: they participate in the archetypal union of Ra and Osiris, which results in spiritual resurrection and restoration of the soul's primeval intelligible nature. The human beings who were swallowed by the rope-like Apep (the ignorant mortal nature) now raise their heads from the serpent's body. The circular Lake of Fire, inhabited by a uraeus, is also represented.

The creative and illuminative power of Ra is sometimes symbolized by the sceptre of Atum. As the divine Intellect, Ra is equivalent to *Buddhi* which derives from the Sanskrit root *budh,* meaning "to wake up", and is clearly distinguished from *manas,* the discursive mind standing between the senses and *buddhi.* The world of Platonic Forms, or the realm of radiant luminosity identical with the archetypal fount of being, namely, Atum-Ra, is an object of mystical experience. Like the Plotinian *Nous,* "it might be likened to a living sphere… to a globe of faces radiant with faces all living, to unity of souls, all the pure souls… with Intellect enthroned over all…" (*Enn.* VI.7.15.24-29).

The *noesis* (intellection) which deals with the Forms, or *akhu*-lights, is provided by Ra as a graceful illumination. The illumination is synonymous with the unity of the Eye of Ra and its receptacle. The goal of Ra in the Duat is to gaze on his own corpse and effect the resurrection of Osiris-Amenrenf, "he whose name is hidden". Sometimes the corpse of Osiris appears lying in a sarcophagus surrounded by the snake Ouroboros. The sun ball pushed by the scarab beetle contains Osiris and Ra, and, after the union of these gods in the Duat, Ra emerges from the ball in the form of a ram's head.

This pattern of unification and regeneration may be repeated at different levels of being. The sarcophagus and the tomb may be equated to the temple – a place where gods are revealed, since the temple itself may be invoked as the form of a god. The building activities, the liturgical acts and the theogonic contemplations – all are related. The ritual invocation effects the appearance of the god (*ad khai*) by calling forth his hidden being from the primordial darkness, the tomb, or the hidden (*sheta*) naos of the "black stone" (*iner kem*). Thus, through the rites of *peri* and *khai* the deity is manifested into daylight and, likewise, the transformed initiate emerges from the Osirian Duat. As an equivalent of the king, the initiate himself becomes the lord of the rituals (*neb irit ikhet*), who creates and maintains the divine life. His body is the coffin (*ankh*) and the temple. Therefore R. B. Finnestad says:

"The effect of the uniting of the *ba* of the god with his temple is that all gods are seen in his light and acquire existence in his theophany. The mythologem of the *ba* flying out of the underworld and spreading his light in the cosmic room is his coming to unite with the divine forms of cosmos, and these include not only the forms of the Winged Disk – engraved over the doorways along his road – but the forms of all gods:

they come into being in his light and they are forms of his light, manifesting his diversified being. The uniting act of the creator means that he communicates himself; the gods receive his *ba*-capacity, the capacity of the light manifested in the sundisk – which is the power to appear from the dark underworld".[45]

The *Book of Praying to Ra in the West, Praying to the United One in the West,* usually described as the *Litany of Ra,* deals with seventy-four divine manifestations (*kheperu*) and seventy-five invocations. The union of Ra and Osiris is emphasized; therefore the names and the depicted figures refer to the main forms of Ra in the Duat. Ra is symbolically regarded as a migratory bird that enters the Duat and thus serves as a paradigm of rebirth repeated by those initiated into the mysteries. For this reason the initiated gnostic, or deceased, confirms that he has a thorough knowledge of Ra's manifestations at the psychic Osirian level: both of their forms and of their names.

This knowledge shows the hidden ways towards union, because the gnostic realizes the true relationship between archetypes and images: his own *ba* is an image of Ra (the demiurgic Intellect) and of Ra's *Ba* (an intellectual part of the Universal Soul). He invokes the mysterious nocturnal Sun, like Lucius, the initiate of the Isis mysteries in Apuleius, who at midnight caught sight of the Sun, dazzling in radiant light (*nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine: Metam.* XL.285). This invocation allows him to encounter Nun, Ra and his divine *Ba.*

The ritual descent (*katabasis*) into the Duat may be experienced inwardly or performed as a descent into a crypt or a tomb, itself frequently equated with the divine "book" which contains an esoteric knowledge (*rekh*) of the solar theophanies and of eternal life. Through this *descensus ad infernos,* the subsequent transformation and meeting the gods "face to face" are achieved in the realization of one's divine identity: "I am one of you".

The initiate is equated both with the corpse and the *ba* of the United One, Osiris-Ra, and, finally, he is assimilated to the divine Intellect itself. His limbs are deified and he becomes "entirely a god" who can affirm this spiritual miracle saying in triumph: "I am Ra".

13. The Inner Alchemical Work and Return to Itself

The return to the solar Principle is "the return to itself" (*he epistrophe pros heauton*), to the self-knowledge of *Nous*, and this self-knowledge is the knowledge of the luminous Forms, not of a private self. The modes of cognition correspond to the grades of reality. And as the divine Forms are paradigms for their subsequent images, so *Nous* is the paradigm of all modes of cognition. In a certain sense, all knowledge is Ra's knowledge, albeit manifested as a hierarchy of different modes and degrees. This is because all things are either intelligible (*noeta*), or objects of discursive thought (*dianoeta*), whose objects are images (*eikones*) of the intelligibles; or objects of perception (*aistheta*), which themselves are images of discursive thought (*Anon. Proleg.* VIII).

However, as T. Burckhardt pointed out, in connection with the reflection of archetypal realities on lower levels of being, "the imagination possesses a certain advantage over abstract thought", because "it is capable of multiple interpretation" and relies on the inverse correspondence that exists between the corporeal and spiritual realms".[46] The self-knowledge which the Delphic oracle exhorts us to seek is self-reflective activity by which the soul realizes its immortal essence (Damascius *In Phaed.*176.6; Olympiodorus *In Alcib.* I,8.15-9.19). As Proclus argues, this knowledge is also knowledge of the Forms that are transcendent in the sense of being "exempt" (*exeremena*) from subjects and "unknowable" to them, except by the heart-intellect which is unattainable by lower recipients (*In Parm.*949.13-28).

There are different kinds and degrees of transcendence and a twofold unity for every class of plurality: one that is immanant and one that is transcendent. According to L. Siorvanes, the Latin *transcendere* is coined for the Greek term meaning displacement or transition (*metabasis*) and also is related to *epekeina*, "on the far side", "beyond" (cf. Plato *Rep.*509b).[47]

Self-knowledge is knowledge of what is above, in the realm of archetypes, because the effect is contained within the cause and in knowing the latter one must know the former. Thus self-reflectivity constitutes a return to one's source, and the idea of *imago dei* (*tut neter* of the Egyptians) provides the metaphysical basis for the *epistrophe pros heauton*, return to one's true and divine Self. Proclus argues that the soul is not merely a living entity but also life itself, capable of self-knowledge, and therefore *gnosis* is a kind of life. This self-reflective activity belongs only to a non-bodily entity (*ET* 187).

The imagination as a mirror reflects images which come from a higher ontological level and the sight or contemplation of them turns the soul back towards that higher level.[48] Proclus says:

"Just as nature stands creatively above the visible figures, so the soul, exercising her capacity to know (*kata to gnostikon energousa*), projects on the imagination, as on a mirror, the principles of the figures (*tous ton schematon logous*); and the imagination, receiving in pictorial form these reflections of the ideas within the soul, by their means affords the soul an opportunity to turn inward from the pictures (*ton eidolon*) and attend to herself. It is as if a man looking at himself in a mirror and marvelling at the power of nature and of his own appearance (*morphen heauton*) should wish to look upon himself directly and possess such a power as would enable him to become at the same time the seer and the object seen" (*In Euclid.*141.2ff).

There is a hierarchy of knowledge. Even in examining physical things a displacement (*metabasis*) and an ascent from the corporeal to the incorporeal state may be observed, because sense-perceived bodies belong analytically to a different rank than their physical qualities. One who cares to transfer his attention to the Forms from the things of sense ought to establish intellect instead of opinion (*doxa*) "as his guide on the road" and contemplate each Form as unconnected with sensible things. However, theurgic faith transcends both discursive reasoning and intellect. According to Proclus, the souls who are to be led upwards show their readiness to participate in the divine and need the help of attendant daimons for their ascent. By this help (since everywhere what is imperfect joins itself to the perfect through its fitness for the daimonic gifts) they are lifted up to more divine causes which are completely separate from body (*In Parm.*666-668).

This separation of the *ba* from the body is implied in the short invocation to Sokar (*BD* 74). The soul of the deceased, liberated from the earthbound body, shines in the sky and climbs on the sunshine, though her body remains inert. As A. Roberts pointed out, this out-of-body experience, celebrated by the ritual dances and chants of Hathor, releases certain supernatural powers able to regenerate existence anew in the solar circuit:

"Just as a live plant comes from an apparently lifeless seed, and Horus comes from Osiris, so the *ba* now soars from the body which is viewed as a seemingly lifeless corpse".[49]

The author says that this liberation is also celebrated in the beautiful chant of the Ancestor Ritual, following the pharaoh's service at the Heliopolitan sun altars. By the Ancestor Ritual A. Roberts means the XIX Dynasty ritual performed for the ancestral rulers, also known as the Ritual of Amenhotep I. She interprets this ritual as a threefold passage of rebirth which consists in 1) reintegration, the cult renewal of the body, 2) regeneration of life in the heart realm, and 3) the service of Osiris which leads to cosmic Heliopolitan rebirth.[50]

This is the sevenfold transformational journey made according to fixed theological patterns. The same archetypal structure recurs in a variety of different ways in the architectural design of the New Kingdom temples, in the journey of death and rebirth through the body of Nut depicted in the *Book of Night* and even in the composition of the *Memphite theology*. The passage through the twelve hours of the *Book of the Night* (the tomb of Ramesses VI provides two complete versions of this book) means both 1) a re-creation of the world and 2) spiritual liberation of the initiate.

While seeking the flame-like heart-intellect in the psychosomatic darkness, the initiate travels through the inner organs of the sky goddess Nut. Her macrocosmic divine body is related to the microcosmic structure of the initiate's body. Like the Tantric *sadhaka*, the "traveller" resembles a finely tuned instrument: the rituals and visualizations, along with breath exercises, lead to the activation of the elevating serpent power of Hathor. Like the Tantric *chakras,* created by yogic visualization, the inner organs of Nut, related to different night-hours and different *kheperu* of Ra, are imagined and experienced in this inward odyssey from the tomb to solar immortality.

Mental purification consists primarily in meditation and visualization of *seshemu,* the hidden images imbued with subtle transformative power, especially by visualizing one's members as *neteru* and as constituent elements of the divine body. This exercise includes one's identification with the proper deity. Contrary to the Greek philosophical *theoria*, which relied on discursive reasoning and dialectic, at least at the lower levels of the soul's *anabasis,* the Egyptian *theoria* is based on the transforming power of imagination, guided by theological reasoning which follows archetypal patterns. The images are not defined as illusory simulacra (the means of ontological deceit) but regarded as vehicles of the serpent power of Hathor-Sekhmet.

The concentration upon graphic representations of a deity, upon its hieroglyphs and the related *heka*-names, is a part of a spiritual discipline inseparable from sacred rites. Therefore *theoria* consists in the contemplation of dynamic divine constellations perceived through mental and natural images, or of one's worshipped deity regarded as one's very Self. The transformative inner ritual, itself based on knowledge of divine names and visualizations of symbols, constitutes a progressive catharsis aimed at the creation of the luminous golden body, *sah* (analogous to the Tantric *diviya-deha*), and the transcendence of the self. This means the passage from self-imposed confinement into a mortal body and into the finite world, that is, from the irrational disorder (*isefet*) and imbalance to the rational order (*maat*) and the transcendent balance of *peras* and *apeiria*, the equilibrium of Horian and Sethian forces.

The inner alchemical work consists in a proper re-arrangement of divine powers through their images and symbols. The means of analogy are employed to depict a relationship between *eikones* and *paradeigmata*. The microcosmic tomb (or the horizon of one's psychosomatic consciousness) becomes a battle-field of Ra and Apep. The battle itself may be likened to the semiotic game conducted between the transformed (living) and damned (dead) elements of oneself. The Sun's death and rebirth journey through the twelve night hours not only serves as a model for the inner alchemy of human consciousness, but also can be seen as a symbolic journey through the twelve months of the annual cycle and the related festivals. A. Roberts says:

"This night journey is one of the fundamental deep processes underlying mythology, liturgy, ritual and sacred architecture during the New Kingdom, a process in which the 12 hours of cosmic night are ritually transposed into seven stages of transformation enacted in a threefold temple".[51]

The totality of the course of Ra encompasses three divine realms: the primeval Waters, the intelligible cosmos, and the Duat. They correspond roughly to the One (Nun), Intellect, and Soul of the Neoplatonists. With the help of Nun, or a crocodile-headed Sobek, the nocturnal Sun (which may symbolize the potential intellect) is actualized – transformed into a scarab or a child. The solar rebirth occurs on Nut's thighs when the *ba* reaches the twelth hour named "She who sees the beauty of Ra" in the *Book of Night.* This rebirth is described as the opening of a ball of clay formed by a craftsman, or the opening of the cavern "for those who are in Nun" (*BD* 67). In this respect, the tomb is symbolically related to the highest ineffable Reality, the supreme source of all life and all intelligence.

This idea is echoed in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature, for example, in the treatise on goldmaking attributed to Kleopatra. Ostanes and other philosophers asked Kleopatra to tell

"how the highest descends to the lowest, and how the lowest rises to the highest, and is united with it... how the blessed waters visit the corpses lying in Hades fettered and afflicted in darkness and how the Medicine of Life reaches them and rouses them..."[52]

The dead bodies in their tombs are like the stars which are hidden for seventy days in the House of Geb, or the Duat, in order to be regenerated there. The union of *bau* and their corpses in the Duat is the result of the paradigmatic union of Ra and Osiris followed by the miracle of rebirth through the gate "with the mysterious entrance".

This mystery of sunrise is the ultimate aim and end (*telos*) of philosophy. Only the soul which has practised philosophy successfully is pure when it leaves the body and, therefore, may attain to the divine nature, according to Plato (*Phaed.*82bc). The philosopher's soul goes to a glorious, pure, and invisible place "into the presence of the good and wise God", and this way to the true Hades is reserved "only for the lover of wisdom" (ibid.82c).

Accordingly, Kleopatra speaks of the miraculous waters, like those of the reviving Nile, which are able to awaken the bodies and the spirits imprisoned in their tombs. In a little while they grow and rise up, putting on glorious colours like flowers in spring. They are not mature till the fire has tested them. But

"when the tomb is opened, they come out from Hades as the babe from the womb."[53]

The practitioners of alchemy called their art "philosophy" which consists in a process of death and resurrection, modelled on the ancient Egyptian "mysteries of the stone" and the "flight of the golden Horus". However, the main patterns of alchemy stem directly from the New Kingdom Books of the Duat, those that depict the secret *seshemu* of the tomb-temple, the "philosophical" separation of *ba*, its transformation and miraculous union with the mummiform corpse. This union means renewal of the sun-intellect, symbolized by the golden light. Thus the royal soul (the most perfect one) is turned into *akh* and enters the Day of the intelligible realm while Osiris, though animated, must remain in the realm of the psychic Duat.

The tomb functions as a temple, and every temple during the night hours becomes the *set-amun*, a place of transcendent darkness where the god has hidden his form so that nobody knows or sees him before his coming into being. This is a place where transition from latent to manifest life takes place. Therefore R. B. Finnestad argues:

"Death is life in the *sheta*-state; and there is also a *coming out* (*prj*) from the tomb analogous to the coming out from the temple; the function of the tomb is in this respect parallel to that of the temple: the tomb is a place of the hidden world from which the *ba* of the dead person comes out, the place of his latent life. Like the temple, the tomb is also a place of *uniting* with the sun: the sun unites with the reliefs or paintings of the world represented in the hall, when the tomb is opened – and the cosmic life of the dead person emerges into being. He even has a statue which lives his *ka*-life in the cosmicized tomb".[54]

14. Metaphysics of the Heart

The heart (*ab, ib*) plays a crucial role in the transformation of the soul and in its striving for the golden state of perfection. According to Stephanus of Alexandria:

"We must strip matter of its qualities to arrive at perfection; for the aim of philosophy (i.e., alchemy) is the dissolution of bodies and the separation of the soul from the body".[55]

The heart is a seat of intellect within the human microcosm, often equated with one's very being. Since the heart held the individual's life and intelligence, the form of the related hieroglyph was reminiscent of a vase, or an alchemical vessel, and scarabs were depicted on the heart-amulets wrapped with the mummy. In addition, the heart (weighed against the feather of *maat* before the throne of Osiris) was the only organ left inside the mummiform body.

The Heart of Atum is the true source of his activity by which the divine Ennead is created. The fiery Eye of Ra, Hathor-Sekhmet, dwells at the heart of the macrocosm, and the microcosmic heart-intellect (*nous*) is the eye of the soul. Plotinus stressed the transcendency of *nous* and described it as *basileus* (pharaoh, king) to which we turn. One becomes *nous* when one abandons all the other phases of oneself and gazes on *nous* by means of *nous*, i.e., by the integral Eye of Horus. M. Lings speaks of the openness of the Eye of the Heart as an inward opening that distinguishes the saint from the ordinary man:

"The significance of this inward opening may be understood through the relationship between the sun and the moon which symbolize respectively the Spirit and the Heart: just as the moon looks towards the sun and transmits something of its reflected radiance to the darkness of the night, so the Heart transmits the light of the Spirit to the night of the soul. The Spirit itself lies open to the Supreme Source of all light, thus making, for one whose Heart is awake, a continuity between the Divine Qualities and the soul."[56]

The right eye (*wedjat*) is that of the sun, the Eye of Ra. The left eye is that of the moon, the Eye of Horus. The restored Eye of Horus (or Thoth) is the mirror of intellect which is illuminated by higher paternal Intellect and is the symbol of offerings. For the Egyptians, all bodily organs function only because the heart "speaks from the vessels of every limb" and commands them to do so. S. H. Nasr regards the heart as the centre of the human microcosm and therefore the seat of sentiments, of the will and "of the Intellect by which all things were made". He tries to connect the word heart (*hrdaya* in Sanskrit, *kardia* in Greek, *cordis* in Latin) with the root *hrd* or *krd* which, "like the Egyptian Horus, imply the centre of the world".[57]

This cardial intelligence is never separated from either faith or love and must be viewed as the microcosmic reflection or prolongation of divine intelligence, the noetic light of Ra. The centrality of heart-intellect is the centrality of Horus, represented by the ruling pharaoh – the exemplary *imago dei*, the Heart, Sia and Hu of all hearts in Egypt. Hathor, or *Het Heru*, is the "house of Horus" and the power, *shakti*, of the Heart.

J. Assmann distinguishes three major historical stages of what we should call "metaphysics of the heart" in Egypt. However, the different historical aspects, modes, and paradigmatic attitudes of spiritual hermeneutics related to a particular interpretative framework cannot lead us to the false conviction proclaimed by J. P. Vernant, namely, "that there is no such thing as pure mind",[58] or intelligence, essentially untouched by imposed historical, psychological, and social conditions. J. Assmann speaks about 1) the ideal of the "king-guided" individual, coeval with the Old Kingdom, when the heart of the pharaoh thinks and plans for all; 2) the "heart-guided" individual of the Middle Kingdom, when the heart full of *maat*, based on personal merit, enables a life in harmony with the gods that transcend death; 3) the "god-guided heart" of the New Kingdom that has taken God's guiding will into itself.[59]

The passion and resurrection of Osiris were originally reserved for the royal initiate who, as the illuminated and awakened *ba* of Osiris, was transformed into a star, or an intelligible archetype. The initiate or his travelling soul plays the role of Horus at the beginning. He is the physician for Osiris, Horus the Healer. Being armed by the therapeutic wisdom of Thoth, he restores the dismembered divine Eye or the mirror-like Heart. This means a sort of "philosophical integration". The Horus role ceases when Osiris begins to revive and the initiated is identified with Osiris ready to be united with Ra.

J. Assmann argues that the advent of popular Osirianism of the Middle Kingdom "opened up a new path of salvation over and above the lithic route of Imhotep",[60] because "the true tomb" is now equated with one's virtue: it is built by knowing truth and doing right. The Judgement in the Duat is no longer modelled on earthly tribunals but rather on initiatory rituals of trial and purification.[61]

In New Kingdom Egypt, the esoteric teachings of the heart-intellect are explicitly stated and popularized as the doctrine of "putting god into one's heart", which means personal piety and devotion extended into all aspects of life. Thus, instead of the impersonal norms of *maat*, which constitute immanent justice and order, the personal will of God is emphasized. Therefore the Ramesside period teachings of Amenemope advises one to make one's heart steadfast and regard *logos* as the rudder of the boat and the God-of-All as its steersman (XX.3-6). Now pious individuals with a "god-guided heart" do not seek for protection among men, but regard Amun as their sole protector. They are *fuqara*, the poor ones in a special sense, whose service to the pharaoh is replaced by service and loyalty to God.

Now piety is based not on *maat* as social order and justice, but on the inner "silence". Therefore this metaphysical silence becomes the main virtue of pious contemplative men, the silent ones who submitted themselves to God's will. This attitude is a distant prototype of Pythagorean introspection and silence. The mysticism of the heart-intellect implies the dialectic of exterior and interior; it appeals both to the immanent divine presence and to the hiddenness of *deus invisibilis* who surpasses all human and divine knowledge. The devotee says:

"You are Amun, lord of the silent,
Who comes at the call of the pure".[62]

The Lord is known to be merciful. However, He is closed to the one "who has found his mouth, but is open to the silent". Only the silent one finds the well of Thoth in the desert of this earthly life. Otherwise the sweet spring of immortality is closed and beyond one's reach. The language proceeds from the holy silence and returns again to it, as S. H. Nasr pointed out while speaking about the eye of knowledge which the Sufis call the eye of the heart (*'ayn al-qalb*).[63]

15. Understanding of Soul and Body

Through the Orphic, Bacchic, and Pythagorean circles the Egyptian doctrines of 1) an *imago dei,* 2) the heart-intellect, 3) dismemberment and reconstitution of one's primordial "golden" nature, 4) separation of the immortal soul from the body, and 5) union with the divine Principle were all transmitted to the Hellenic world, transformed, adapted and rationalized. Those esoteric cults, whose teaching was later taken up and transposed by Plato into the field of philosophy (e.g., the theory of Ideas, philosophy as preparation for death, and ascent to the *huperouranios topos*), elaborated doctrines of the soul's immortality that separate it from the body now regarded as a tomb, or a receptacle (*hupodoche*), of the soul.

This radical affirmation of an immortal and divine element within us which marked a turning point or even rupture in the Hellenic culture is based on the creative reinterpretation of Egyptian metaphysical initiations, rites, and symbols, merged with scientific and religious ideas derived from Assyria, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Persia and India. There are clear structural parallels between Egyptian, Orphic and Upanishadic texts.

The Pythagorean purification, concentration and separation of the soul always mean an *anamnesis* which is no less than recollection of the divine source and the soul's true noetic identity. Their philosophical *askesis* follows the already established patterns of the Osirian initiation, trial and transformation aimed at emancipating the soul in this life (as it will be after death in the Duat) and assimilating it to God. Platonic purification (*katharsis*) also consists in separating (*to chorizein*) the soul from the body and teaching the soul to bring itself together from all parts of the body (*Phaed.*67cd). This philosophical or dialectical procedure clearly resembles a reconstitution of the dismembered Osiris and his union with Ra.

In the so-called "archaic" period, which is dated after the Egyptian Ramesside Age and coincides with the Neo-Assyrian expansion, the Greeks (called *Iawanu* by the Assyrians) still do not make a clear distinction between body and soul. They had no term to designate the body as an organic unity, since the word *soma* (like its Egyptian equivalent) designated a corpse, and *guia* – the bodily members. As J.-P. Vernant pointed out, "the Greek body of antiquity does not appear as a group morphology of organs fitted together in the manner of an anatomical drawing", but rather assumes the form of a sort of heraldic picture, a coat of arms on which each person's social and personal status is inscribed through emblematic traits and can therefore be deciphered.[64] Even beauty, understood as a radiance of the gods, can be poured onto the body from the outside by touching it with the golden wand (*Od.* XVI.173-183).

Such transformation carried through the operation of the divine "form" is analogous to the luminous descent of *ba* onto the statue and is imitated in the activities of purifying, bathing, censing and applying oils to the body which (when cleansed of everything that makes it blemished, disfigured or dirty) belongs to the same category as a god's statue. However, the mortal body vanishes after its death or the departure of its vital forces: only the *mnema*, or *sema*, the funeral memorial, remains as a kind of corporeal substitute. The corpse, *soma*, would rot and decay if the consuming pyre did not transfer it into invisibility, or if the rite of embalming did not turn it into an immutable form, the beautiful Osirian *eidos*, which serves as a visible sign, *semeia*, of the transformed divine body characterized by its blinding splendour and excess of light.

However, such a hidden intelligible body "radiant with immortal beauty" (*kallos ambroton*) was reserved for the Greek gods, not for human beings. The Egyptian mysteries of divinization were introduced only as secret, attractive, and sometimes suspicious doctrines of the soul's immortality, namely, that by rising up to the Sun, or the divine *Nous*, we may be dissolved into the luminous substance of the Self from which derive our fragmented, dismembered, and fallen selves. This gnostic salvation is built on a transcendent insight that goes beyond reason, i.e., on revelation and initiation that show the path of "homecoming" leading to the Sun-gates and "another shore".

Like the Egyptians, the Greeks of the archaic period used the body's vocabulary to express a being whatever its actual ontological status. According to general scholarly opinion, the so-called "Homeric religion" (if understood literally, not in the light of certain Neoplatonic hermeneutical readings) lacked the gnostic notion of the immortal *ba* and its mystical re-union with the supreme God. However, there are striking similarities with Egyptian and Mesopotamian anthropology even before the advent of Pythagorean metaphysics. A living man is never said to possess a *psuche*. In this respect, the *psuche* is analogous to the *ba* which appears only when separated from the corpse. But the Egyptian initiates acquire their *bau* through theurgic rites, *askesis*, contemplation, and *gnosis*. This acquisition means a "death" before one's physical death and mystical re-union with Ra whilst one is still here below.

16. The Homecoming of Odysseus

From the Homeric epics it is clear that living human beings do not have a *psuche*, but once they are dead, they become *psuchai* – not the Egyptian *bau*, however, but impoverished shades destined for eternal darkness. They are not souls but phantoms, *simulacra*, that lack a real existence. One could assume that this is only an exoteric attitude which is intentionally incomplete and concerns so-called psychic remains, shadow-like doubles (*kau*), or that there is a deeper significance running beneath the apparent surface of events and names. Homer's two songs are only the central part of an epic cycle which initially ran from the imagined beginning of the world, the Golden Age, down to the Heroic Age. M. Bernal, for instance, maintains that the *Odyssey* is a Greek version of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead.* He says:

"While I am convinced that the vast majority of Greek mythological themes came from Egypt or Phoenicia, it is equally clear that their selection and treatment were characteristically Greek, and to that extent they did reflect Greek society".[65]

S. R. Hill, who bases his interpretations on *dhatava* and *stoicheia* – the unmanifested and universal roots of all constituent matter and all language (since everything in creation begins as *dhatu* seed which are heard only by Atman in the noetic realm, though their *sphota* – bursting expansion - creates an entire universe), says that the whole of *The Odyssey* can be viewed as a tale of a man who had to be stripped of everything in the process of "surrendering himself". Both Rama, the main hero of *Ramayana,* and Odysseus had to learn "to surrender" before they could be reunited with their real creative power, represented by Penelope and Sita respectively.[66] If so, Odysseus' homecoming is the journey of the initiate, which involves various tests, encounters with divine powers, transformations and return to the paternal *Nous.*

For T. Burckhardt, who based his interpretation on Porphyry's exegesis, Penelope represents the soul in its original purity, as the faithful wife of the spirit: the fact that she weaves her nuptial garment by day and each night undoes it again shows that her nature is related to universal substance, *phusis* or *maya.*[67] According to T. Burckhardt:

"Every path leading towards spiritual realization requires of man that he strip himself of his ordinary and habitual ego in order that he may truly become 'himself', a transformation which does not take place without the sacrifice of apparent riches and of vain pretensions, and thus not without humiliation…"[68]

For certain Hellenic philosophers, the world of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* symbolizes the soul's dialectical ascent: expressing these matters through riddles (*di' ainigmaton*), Homer, being a philosopher himself, keeps spiritual things hidden and refrains from speaking of them directly. His poems could sustain multiple levels of meaning simultaneously and without contradiction. Thus, Numenius and Porphyry regard Odysseus as the symbol of man who tries to escape the realm of becoming (*genesis*) and arrives at that intelligible place where there is not even any memory of the physical universe.

During his wanderings in the realm of Poseidon (an equivalent of Egyptian *St,* transcribed as *Seth* in Greek and *Sutekk* in Akkadian) Odysseus has had to face twelve major obstacles which are spiritual tests and phases of his inner transformation, like the twelve hours of the

Egyptian Duat passed by the nocturnal Sun. The Byzantine commentators of Homer thought that line 296 of Book XIII (which concerns the retelling of Teiresias' prophecy by Odysseus to Penelope) was the last line of the *Odyssey*. The end of Odysseus' journey over the dark and stormy sea of generation would be marked by complete ignorance of material works: when a wayfarer, seeing Odysseus' oar, would think that it was a winnowing fan, then the ultimate surrender and return to the divine Intellect would be accomplished.

S. R. Hill regards a winnowing fan as "the very symbol of Ganesha's ears, which kept the words of untruth and of the unwise away from the soul".[69] The nature of the death prophesized for Odysseus is close to Hesiod's description of death in the Golden Age, which is the blissful return (*pralaya*) to the Creator, or rather to His *saccidananda*[70]: "that which is" (*sat*, Being), "the consciousness of that which is" (*cit*, Intellect), and "the bliss of the consciousness of that which is" (*ananda*, joy of Life). This is the triad of Atum-Tefnut (Maat)-Shu (Ankh) in the Heliopolitan theology.

The chief suitor of Odysseus' wife (*Penelopeia* means "weaving worker", like the Egyptian goddess Neith), namely, Antinous, may be deciphered as meaning "opposite to intelligence". Antinous is killed by Odysseus, though at an early stage of his journey the life of the senses must be transcended not by violence but by contemplation, according to Porphyry, who interprets the cyclops as a part of Odysseus himself – a part he wants desperately to escape, but is unable to do so before the spiritual integration of opposites. However, all "foolish" (*nepioi*) companions are gradually lost, until Odysseus returns alone to Ithaca.

17. From the Homeric Ghost to the Immortal Soul of Plato

According to Porphyry's interpretation, Homer envisioned three places where souls live: 1) the physical realm here below, 2) the Elysian Fields (identified with the portion of the moon illuminated by the sun), analogous to the Osirian Fields of Rushes, *Sekhet Iaru*, where souls take their "psychic" bodies along, and 3) Hades, where they go without bodies (Stob. *Ecl.*1.41.53). He maintained that Homer's Hades contains concentric rings of beings: souls of women, souls of men, and the gods at the centre. In the fragments of *The Styx*, preserved by Stobaeus, Porphyry explains Antikleia's description of the dead (*Od.* XI.219-222) as follows:

"The idea is that souls are like the images appearing in mirrors and on the surface of water that resemble us in every detail and mimic our movements but have no solid substance that can be grasped or touched. This is why he calls them 'images of dead men' (*eidola kamonton: Od.* XI.476)" (Stob. *Ecl.*1.41.50).

The archaic *eidolon* may be defined as 1) a dream image (*onar*), 2) an apparition sent by a god (*phasma*), and 3) a phantom of a deceased (*psuche*). This insubstantial *eidolon* is more like a double that "manifests both a real presence and irremediable absence at the same time",[71] than an image, and this double entirely belongs to the other world. This otherworldly dimension of something invisible glimpsed through (or of the supernatural erupted into) the visible in the form of the archaic *eidolon* is reduced by Plato to the seeming, illusion and nonbeing (*Soph.*240b 11).

The new conception of soul, opposite to the Homeric *psuche* (an *eidolon* or *phasma* of the dead, a ghostly double) is elaborated by the Orphics and Pythagoreans who closely followed the Oriental esoteric teachings of a "perfect man" capable of re-ascending to heaven. This re-ascending presupposes immortalization through the noetic fire (following Horus and the Phoenician Heracles, now regarded as an archetype of the spiritual hero) and liberation of the immortal soul. The Hellenic philosophy from its very beginnings is based on this "passage to new state" and the ideal of rebirth. The soul may be released from the wheel of *genesis* and divinized through asceticism and *philosophia* which may be regarded as a modified and rationalized "branch" of the ancient cultic practices (*teletai*). The golden realm of Ra is its ultimate *telos*; therefore a golden genital attributed to Pythagoras suggested that he is outside the cycle of birth and death, being the true image of Apollo.

It is with Plato that the inversion of the relations between body and soul is completed. As J.-P. Vernant pointed out:

"Instead of the individual being intimately bound to a living body and a *psuche* presented like the *eidolon* of the body that is no longer here, its phantom or double, it is now the immortal *psuche* that constitutes one's real being."[72]

The soul constitutes one's real being not after one's death, but in this life itself. The soul becomes "our self in each of us" (*Leg.*12.959a). Therefore the living body radically changes its status: it is only the image of resemblance which accompanies the soul, a simple appearance, an illusory image. Now no longer is *psuche* the ghostly *eidolon* of the body but rather body is the ghostly phantom of the soul. This is a revolutionary passage from 1) the soul regarded as a ghostly double of the body-members to 2) the body as a ghostly reflection of the soul, i.e., the body confined to the realm of mere seeming.

Plato devalued the image and positioned it firmly in the sensible world with its irrationalities, inconsistencies, and illusions. The world of images is the world immersed in the flux of the sensible; therefore the life of *phantasia* is not real life but merely a dream and a slumber, "dreaming, whether in sleep or in waking" (*Rep.*476c5). J.-P. Vernant rightly observes that in the Greek texts of the 6th and 5th century B.C. neither *eikasia* (semblance, guess) and *doxa* (opinion, notion, judgement, splendour), nor *phainomena* had yet taken on their essentially negative connotations.[73]

The concept of *doxa* in its Platonic sense of fancy (*dokein* signifies "to seem", "to appear") corresponds to the Hindu concept of *maya* which may be conceived both as a creative cosmic power and a personal delusion of the embodied *jiva*. The image is ascribed to the realm of *doxa*, that is the domain of *phantasia*, since *phantasia* (seeming, imagining) and *aisthesis* (sensation) are regarded as being identical (*Theaet.*152c). However, before the rise of the new Platonic *paideia*, both *eikasia* (using resemblances, comparisons, analogies) and *doxa* (using similitudes as a way of reaching hidden dimensions) were considered adequate strategies of thought. Through the masks of appearances (*phainomena*) one can grasp *adela* (what is invisible); therefore *phainomena* are neither deprived of value, nor illusory. According to Democritus, phenomena constitute the visible aspect of things that are invisible: *opsis ton adelon ta phainomena*. This view stands close to the notion of the sensible cosmos as a display of metaphysical symbols.

The transition from a positive to a negative evaluation of images, now defined as a mode of unreality, that is observed from the 5th century B.C. onwards, may be viewed as a turning away and departure from Egypt and its symbolic iconology, although this separation of *doxa* and *episteme* itself is initially based on the Egyptian distinction between the common mental horizon of worshippers and that which constitutes *rekh*, the esoteric *gnosis* of one's true identity, and involves certain metaphysical *anamnesis*.

In the Upanishadic milieu, this distinction is described as 1) the Path of the Fathers which leads to the level of the moon and then again to the earthly womb, and 2) the Path of the gods (*devayana*) which is based on the interiorization of the Vedic sacrifice and leads to solar liberation through a special kind of knowledge. For those who go from the world of the gods to the sun, from the sun to the light and to the realm of Brahma, there is no return (*BU* VI.13-15).

When the concept of interior sacrifice ("sacrifice" meaning the disciplined life of a seeker of sacred knowledge) is generalized to the entire life of the gnostic, the "philosophical way of life" is established. The true sages go into the afterlife by way of the fire, not by the way of the smoke, and this passage is based on the rite performed within the mind (*manasayajna*), or the heart-intellect. The "interiorization of sacrifice" means the practice of contemplation and meditation. The distinction between the two paths, firmly established by the Upanishads, arises in the age of Brahmanas (c.800-500 B.C.) which chronologically coincides with the period of the XXV-XXVI Dynasties (Shabaka, Taharqa, etc.) and the Saite period in Egypt.

The philosophy of Plato requires the aspirant to pass from seeming to the reality of Forms through recollection (*anamnesis*) and knowledge (*episteme*), as if following the path of the Egyptian initiate who identifies himself with the winged soul in order to fly to the solar barque and join the intelligible circuit of the gods. Although Plato based his concept of the immortality of the soul upon Parmenides' concept of true being, this "being" itself represents the Egyptian concept of "what is" (*netet*) contrasted with "that which is not" (*iutet*): both are engendered by the Lord of All, *Neb tem*, i.e., Atum, "the sole and only one". As S. Slaveva-Griffin pointed out, Plato

> "employs the allegory of the charioteer's journey to illustrate the immortal nature of the soul (*Phaedr.*246a 6-b4), alluding thereby to Parmenides' account of the chariot journey of a young philosopher beyond sense-perceptible reality to the realm of eternal existence".[74]

The wisdom "which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts" is attainable only "when we are dead, and not in our lifetime" (*Phaed.*66b). Therefore Plato defines philosophy in a way that conforms to what he regards as an ancient tradition, naming it a practice for death. This attitude is directly related to an attitude of the Osirian tomb-initiation which legitimizes "the deceased" as the god of wisdom, Thoth, and through the "scientific" knowledge of names and contemplation of forms leads to the Sun god in his barque.

Purification, concentration, and separation of the soul here also mean recollection and divinization. Thus, the aim of philosophical *askesis*, as practised by a disciple of immortality, is to separate the soul from the flux of becoming and seeming in this life, bringing it to the state it will experience after death and providing it with an unchanging divine existence. Since the *psuche* constitutes the reflection projected by external and immortal Being (i.e., is an image of Ra, a ray of Atum), it is the soul of man which is capable of the knowledge of being, namely, recollection (*anamnesis*) of the intelligible realities and realization that "I am Ra". According to W. Burkert:

> "What mystery priests had sought to make credible in ritual thus becomes the certainty of the highest rationality… The word which in the epic tradition distinguished the gods from men becomes the ineradicable seal of the essential personality, *athanatos*".[75]

The immortal soul transcends the body affected by death: it is called on to ascend with a passionate undertaking described by Plato in the language of the mysteries. This is an initiation which secures a blessed state and an intellectual vision (*epopteia*). The love and contemplation of divine beauties means that the winged soul cannot be abandoned by the gods: there is no longer practical piety as a virtue in its own right, but only the one goal, namely, return to the starry archetypes and "assimilation to God as far as possible". W. Burkert continues:

"In place of the beholding of festivals of the gods there is the beholding of the well ordered cosmos of things that are, still called by the same word, *theoria.* This involves restraint of individual wishes, knowing integration…"[76]

18. Reawakening of Intellect and Rehabilitation of Images

Plato employed and reinterpreted the central Osirian and Orphic myth of the ritual death, dismemberment, and reconstitution of the initiate, turning this myth into his own dialectic of analysis and synthesis aimed at self-transcendence. Thus, the pedagogy of the soul derived from telestic rites and was reduced to mystagogy again by the Neoplatonists.

Plato defines the soul as that which moves itself – life which has an ability to animate and move the cosmic body and individual bodies. This concept stands close to the Egyptian *ba*-theology, but now a proof of immortality is developed on the seemingly solid scientific ground of dialectic, mathematical sciences, geometry, and astronomy. The latter is viewed as being fundamental to the ontology of an animated cosmos and cosmic piety.

As in the *Pyramid Texts*, the stars are regarded as the archetypal abodes of divinized souls, because man is rooted in heaven. Being a plant of heaven on earth, man has the divine element within itself, namely, the hidden Eye of Horus, the heart-intellect (*nous*), synonymous with a *daimon* in man. This intellect, when awakened through recollection, purification, philosophical exercises and knowledge, leads the soul back to its own archetypal star from which it has descended. This is the central aim of philosophy: the homecoming or return to one's native star. In Platonism, the ancient rites of noetic rebirth are partly translated into the language of science (*episteme*) and retold as a myth of homecoming. In the *Laws* Plato says:

"The situation has been entirely reversed since the days when thinkers thought of the stars as without souls… It is no longer possible that any single mortal will be god-fearing for long if he has not grasped these two principles mentioned, that the soul is the oldest of everything which participates in coming-to-be (and that it is immortal, and that it is ruler over all bodies), and moreover (secondly) he must grasp as has now been said many times, the intelligence of being which is in the stars, as mentioned, and in addition also the necessary preliminary mathematical sciences" (*Leg.*967a ff).

Since a perishable and visible body is the *eidolon* of an invisible and immortal soul, it follows that the soul in turn is the *eidolon nou*, the image or reflection of the intelligible. According to Plotinus, the intellect is "separated" (*choristos*) in its relation to the soul, and likewise the soul is "separated" in relation to the body. However, what intellect, soul and body have in common is that they are types, levels, or modes of *energeia* (actuality or activity)[77]. Therefore there are no sharp distinctions between *psuche* and *soma:* bodies that are completely devoid of a soul, and that do not partake in any *energeia* whatsoever, are reduced to sheer indeterminacy. Hence, "physical" phenomena are in a sense "psychic" phenomena, though it is not the soul itself, but its "reflection", an "image" of it, that is fused with the body and makes it perform the function of a living organism.

Bodies are animated like the *baituloi,* or *lithoi empsuchoi*, ensouled stones, related with the god Apollo. Likewise the *anthelioi theoi*, "gods that face the sun", i.e., the statues at the entrance of buildings, are animated by the pneumatic rays of the sun. The soul is a kind of light from Intellect, "around the Intellect without having a place", and the soul, through contemplation, "creates the contemplated object just as geometricians draw their figures while contemplating" (*Enn.* III.8.4.7). The soul's activity (*energeia*) constructs the lines which confine the space filled up by a body.

Plotinus even goes so far as to speak of the divine *Nous* as the first image of the One. On the next ontological level the Soul is viewed as the reflection (*eidolon*) of *Nous.* Thus, contrary to Plato's own reservations regarding all kinds of *eidola, eikones*, and *phantasmata*, the image is evaluated again by the subsequent Platonic tradition. The Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists proved to be wise enough to dissociate *phantasia* (imagination) from the one-sided concept of *mimesis* understood as imitation of the sensibles, imitation that makes the image merely a semblance, a reproduction of some already given appearance.

Now dissociated from the realm of illusory appearances, imagination had once again acquired the power of contemplating the invisible, i.e., the power of divine symbol that characterized the ancient Egyptian images able to elevate to the noetic realm of Ra, the world of Forms that Plato had reserved for "philosophy"[78] understood in somewhat too rationalistic a fashion. The "transcendent imagination" is not the simulator producing semblances "without any true reality", but divine power. This divine power has its own *sophia* which can transform the initiate making him "like a god" (*homoiousthai theoi*). Likewise this power brings images back to their intelligible archetypes.

The rehabilitation of images means an actual return to the telestic rites and sacred arts from which *philosophia* derived its idea of ascent to the real Being which ultimately coincides with the spiritual Self of all souls.

1 R. B. Finnestad *The Meaning and Purpose of Opening the Mouth in Mortuary Contexts.* – Numen: International Review for the History of Religions, 25, 1978, p.130

2 Ibid., p.132

3 Ibid., p.134

4 Titus Burckhardt *Mirror of the Intellect. Essays on Traditional Science and Sacred Art,* Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1987, pp.154-155

5 Heinrich Zimmer *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India,* tr. and ed. by Gerald Chapple and James B. Lawson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp.27-28

6 C. J. de Vogel *The Soma-Sema Formula: Its Function in Plato and Plotinus Compared to Christian Writers.*- Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought. Essays in honour of A. H. Armstrong, ed. H. J. Blumenthal, R. A. Marcus, London: Variorum, 1981, p.89

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Glossary

Agalma: (αγαλμα) image, cult-statue, ornament, shrine, object of worship, something in which one takes delight; *theon agalmata* is the common phrase for "images of the gods" and "cult-statues" which may be "animated" by the theurgists; the word *agalma* contains no implication of likeness and is not a synonym of *eikon*; for Plato, the created cosmos is "a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods" (*ton aidion theon gegonos agalma: Tim.*37c); for the Emperor Julian, the visible Sun is "the living *agalma*, endowed with soul and intelligence and beneficent, of the noetic Father" (*Ep.*51.434).

Aisthesis: (αισθησις) sensation, perception, as an opposite of intellection (*noesis*), understanding and pure thought; more loosely – any awareness; for Plato, some *aistheseis* have names, such as sights, sounds, smells, cold and heat, distress, pleasures, fears, but nameless *aistheseis* are countless (*Theaet.*156b); for Plotinus, perceptions in this world are dim intellections (*noeseis*), and intellections in the noetic world are vivid perceptions; Philo of Alexandria postulates an Idea of *aisthesis*, along with an Idea of *nous*, in the Intellect of God (*Leg. Alleg.* I.21-27).

Akh: the ancient Egyptian term for intelligence, spiritual light, illumination, irradiation; it may designate both a spiritual being (the winged soul, *ba*, divinized and raised above the Osiris state) and the entire spiritual dimension that corresponds to the Neoplatonic *kosmos noetos*; through the celestial ascent a pharaoh (the prototype of a philosopher-mystic of later times) becomes a "shining one" (*akh*), a star irradiating light throughout the cosmos, and is united with Ra (the divine Intellect) as his "son".

Akhet: the Egyptian term meaning "horizon", a kind of sun-door for entering into or coming from the Duat (the Osirian Netherworld); the hieroglyphic sign for "horizon" shows the two peaks with the solar disk between them, protected by the *aker*, a double lion; *akhet* is a threshold realm (comparable to the Islamic notion of *barzakh*) between the Heaven, the Earth, and the Duat; etymologically it is connected with other words meaning radiance, intelligence, noetic light, spirit, "making into a spirit of light"; *akhet* is symbolized by the pyramid; therefore the pharaoh ascends to Heaven (in order to be included into the circuit of Ra) by way of this *akhet*, i.e., the threshold of light; the *akhet* hieroglyph was applied in Egyptian art, especially in architectural forms: the two pylons which flanked the temple's entrance represented the two peaks of akhet, and the statue of Atum-Ra, or Amun-Ra, was displayed for the god's epiphany (*khaai*) between these mountain-like towers.

Al-insan al-kamil: the Arabic term for the Sufi concept of a Perfect Man which, ultimately, derives from the ancient cosmogonies centred on macrocosmic Man (Vedic *Purusha,* Gnostic *Anthropos*); in the Egyptian solar theology, it is represented by the pharaoh, the son of Ra, who unites in himself both Horus and Seth, or is identified with Thoth in all respects; in Sufism, the Perfect Man is God's deputy on earth, because he manifests perfection of all divine attributes; the Prophet Muhammad, Khidr, Solomon, Jesus and other Islamic prophets belong to this category; the Perfect Man is a manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality (like a manifestation of the Neoplatonic *Nous*); the term *haqiqa muhammadiyya* (Muhammadan Reality) is a term of the first thing that God created (i.e., *Nous*, Atum-Ra), and this Reality is manifested within the world (in terms of finality and *telos*) as the Perfect Man; although each individual thing of the world is God's mirror, the Perfect Man, as an apex of all creation (i.e., the Horus-like royal entity), is the perfect mirror and therefore he is both the goal of creation and the link between God and His creation by which God sees Himself; Ibn al-'Arabi contrasts the Perfect Man with the animal man (*al-insan al-hayawan*).

Anagoge: (αναγϖγη) ascent, elevation, bringing up; the approach to the divine realm by means of purifications (*katharmoi*), initiations (*teletai*), the Platonic dialectic and allegorical exegesis, contemplation (*theoria*) and the ineffable sacred rites employed in theurgy; it is prefigured by the sacred way which the initiates of mysteries (*mustai)* walk, the path to the mountain (*oreibasia*); typological analogies of the Neoplatonic ascent to the divine may be seen in the *Pyramid Texts* and the accounts of *mi'raj* of the Prophet Muhammad in the later Islamic tradition.

Anamnesis: (αναμνησις) recollection, remembrance; in the Orphico-Pythagorean context, it is understood as a remembrance of one's true divine nature, revealed through sacred initiation; the idea of memory and restoration of the soul's true identity is crucial for the Egyptian tradition as reflected in the *Book of the Dead* and later employed by the Pythagoreans and Plato who explains *anamnesis* as the recollection of things known before birth and forgotten *(Meno* 85d); thus Platonic learning is equated to remembering (*Phaed.*72e).

Ankh: the Egyptian term meaning "life"; the hieroglyph *ankh,* originally perhaps representing a knot or a bow, is a symbol for divine life, for the "breath of life", provided by Shu and other gods, and for regenerating the power of water; *ankh* also designates a floral bouquet (offered to the gods) and a mirror, itself an important metaphysical symbol; various items used in hieratic rites (e.g., the hooped sistrum) were fashioned in the shape of this hieroglyph; the *ankh* survived into the Coptic period and was inherited by the Christians as the *crux ansata.*

Anthropos: (ανθροπος) man; in Gnosticism, the macrocosmic *anthropos* is regarded as the Platonic "ideal animal", *autozoon*, or a divine *pleroma*, which contains archetypes of creation and manifestation.

Apatheia: (απαθεια) impassivity or freedom from emotions, understood as a philosophical virtue; *apatheia* means not being affected in any way and is applied both to the sages and transcendent entities by the Neoplatonists.

Apeiron: (απειρον) *(apeiros, apeiria):* lacking of limit, unlimited, as an opposite to *peras*, a bound; the even as an opposite to the odd; this is a fundamental Pythagorean term, designating one of the main principles of manifested being; the Pythagorean Unlimited is indefinite and in need of Limit, it is infinite in a negative sense as infinitely divisible; in Neoplatonism, *peras* and *apeiron* constitute the primal archetypal duality located somewhere between the ineffable One and the noetic cosmos.

Aporrhetos: (απορρητος) secret, prohibited, unspeakable; the common designation of mysteries and sacred rites of initiation; in Neoplatonism, the term is applied in metaphysics and negative theology, frequently understood as a characteristic of the First Principle.

Apotheosis: (αποθεοσις) divinization; in the esoteric sense it is accomplished by the philosophical purification and theurgical *anagoge* which reveals one's primal and true identity with divine principles; this is not a Homeric conception, because Homer clearly separates the gods and men; however, following the ancient Egyptian spiritual patterns, the Orphic texts already promised *apotheosis* and immortality for the initiated soul who (like the Egyptian *ba* and the *psuche* in Plato's *Phaedrus*) restores her wings and raises herself back to the divine homeland.

Arche: (αρχη) beginning, starting point, authority, government, heart, principle; *archai* are understood as the first principles by Neoplatonists; the term *archetupos*, an archetype, is used by Plotinus in a sense of the divine paradigm or the noetic model of the manifested entity.

Arete: (αρετη) exellence, goodness, virtue; Plotinus makes a distinction between the civic virtues (*politikai aretai*) and the purificatory virtues (*kathartikai aretai*); Porphyry adds two other grades – the theoretic virtues (*theoretikai aretai*) and the paradigmatic virtues (*paradeigmatikai aretai*) – the former being that of the soul which beholds *nous* within itself, the latter being the virtue proper to the divine Intellect, *Nous*, itself; Iamblichus discerns seven grades of virtue which in an ascending order illustrate the anagogic path to the divine: natural, ethical, civic, purificatory, theoretic and paradigmatic virtues are crowned by the hieratic virtues (*hieratikai aretai*) that are proper to the One – they make the soul godlike (*theoeides*) and unite with the First Principle through theurgy.

Arrhetos: (αρρητος) ineffable, unspeakable; this term is close to *aporrhetos* and is used to designate rites and visions of the mysteries and the transcendent nature of the One in Neoplatonism.

Arithmos: (αριθμος) number; for the Pythagoreans, number is the first principle (Arist. *Metaph.*986a15); Iamblichus sometimes identifies the gods with *arithmoi*, regarding the first numbers from the monad to the decad as deities and archetypal models of manifestation; the numerical organization of the cosmos requires the organizing principles of bodies to be treated as physical numbers and distinguishes them from mathematical numbers, which are the paradigms of physical numbers, but ideal, noetic, or eidetic (*eidetikos*), numbers transcend even mathematical numbers.

Askesis: (ασκησις) in ancient philosophy, this term designates not an "asceticism", but spiritual exercises; therefore *philosophia* is understood not as a theory of knowledge but as a lived wisdom, a way of living according to intellect (*nous*); an *askesis* includes remembrance of God, the "watch of the heart", or vigilance (*nepsis), prosoche*, or attention to the beauty of the soul, the examination of our conscience and knowledge of ourselves.

Aten: the Egyptian term for the "sun globe" or "sun disk", regarded as a visible icon of Ra; represented as the simple sun disk, the disk with uraeus, the disk with rays emanating from it, or as the sun disk containing the scarab beetle (*kheper*) and the ram (*ba*); under the reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) the sun disk is worshipped as the solar deity Aten whose rays are depicted as arms proffering *ankh* hieroglyphs.

Atman: the Sanskrit term designating the innermost nature of all divinities, of all living beings, of all manifested forms; according to *Manu Smrti*: "All the gods are this one *atman*, and all dwell in *atman*" (12.119); this is the universal continuum of consciousness, the Self; as an unqualified consciousness being one with *brahman, atman* is self-luminous; it is not "this" nor "that", unseizable, indestructible, unbound, it is not born, nor does it die when the body is slain; it is hidden in all things, but can be perceived only by the sages with the Eye of Intellect (the Egyptian Eye of Ra) when *atman* reveals itself; as *Paramatma* it is the complete and integral supreme Self (the Egyptian Atum-Ra); the ego-personality, or individual self, called *jiva*, is regarded as a root ignorance and, therefore, contrasted to one's true identity – the transcendent Self, or *atman.*

Autozoon: (αυτοζωον) essential living Being, or noetic Animal, which contains within it Ideas of all living creatures and the Archetypes of the four elements (*Tim.*30b); it is a completely coherent *archetypus mundus*, timeless, ungenerated, immaterial and the pefect matrix of the psychic and physical cosmos; for Plotinus, it is a well-rounded-whole, composed of individual intellects, or noetic lights; "a globe of faces radiant with faces all living" (*Enn.* VI.7.15).

Ba: the ancient Egyptian term which means "manifestation" of certain divine qualities, arranged in a descending and ascending hierarchy; in the eschatological and soteriological context, it may be understood as "soul" moving up and down, as an individual in an out-of-body state which is attained through initiation or death, when the physical body (*khat, soma*) is experienced as a corpse; *ba* is the vehicle of ascent, pictured as a human-headed bird which flies into the spheres of light and finally becomes aware of itself as an *akh*; the concept of *ba* influenced the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of soul (*psuche)* who tries to restore her wings through *anamnesis*, initiation into philosophy, and then ascends to the divine realm.

Barzakh: the Arabic term for "isthmus"; an imaginal reality, regarded as a mirror image, is a *barzakh* between the reflected object and the mirror: an imaginal (not imaginary) thing is both the same and different from each of the sides that define it; in Islamic Sufi theology, *barzakh* is taken to mean a certain intermediate state or realm, like the Egyptian Duat, which constitutes a barrier between the two seas of the Quranic cosmology or between any of two different ontological levels of being; it may be compared to 1) a mediating prism which breaks down noetic light into the varied colours of a sensible realm and to 2) a lens which concentrates the rays from above; the period in the *barzakh* (comparable to the Osirian Fields of Rushes) prepares the deceased for the resurrection, just as the time spent in the womb prepares him for birth into this world; according to Ibn al-'Arabi: "The resurrection is a *barzakh*. There is nothing in existence but *barzakhs*, since a *barzakh* is the arrangement of one thing between two other things, like the present moment [between the past and future]" (*Futuhat* III.156.27 W. Chittick); as a mediating instance *barzakh* is equated 1) with the heart (*qalb*) which mediates between the realm of Spirit (*Ruh*) and that of the individual soul (*nafs*), or 2) with the pole (*qutb*) which, in the Sufi hierarchy, functions as the world sustaining and saving *Logos*, i.e., as the Horus-like pharaoh, albeit hidden (because, contrary to the official "state metaphysics" in Egypt, Sufism, often standing against the corrupt official powers, was forced to elaborate the parallel esoteric hierarchy constituted by externally unrecognized "spies of God").

Ben-ben: the Egyptian word carrying the connotation of "outflow"; the pyramid-like sacred stone or pillar that came to be the cult object of Ra in the Heliopolitan temple represents the primordial *ben-ben*, i.e., the noetic "stone", or the primeval hill, which emerges from the apophatic abyss of Nun as the first self-projection of Atum ("All" and "Nothing"), as the seed of the Neoplatonic *kosmos noetos:* "Atum-Khepera, you culminate as hill, you raise yourself up as the *bennu*-bird from the ben-ben stone in the abode of the Phoenix at Heliopolis" (*PT* 1652); the wondrous *bennu*-bird, sitting on the top of the *ben-ben*, is said to come from the Isle of Fire having filled its body with the demiurgic *heka*-power and may be compared to the self-created original solar Word (*Logos*) which brings light into darkness; this bird of light is the primeval hypostasis of Ra, that is, the light-like intelligible Being; Heliopolis represents the symbolic centre of the manifested world, of all theophanies.

Bios: (βιος) life, or a way of life, analogous to the Hindu *darshana*; therefore one can speak of the Pythagorean way of life, the Orphic way of life; to be a philosopher implies a rupture with daily life (*bios*) and purification of one's passions in order to experience the transcendence of divine Intellect and the soul with respect to the mortal body.

Bomiskos: (βωμισκος); *bomos* is the Greek sacrificial altar; being the most important element for the sacred work (more important than the cult stone, tree, and spring) the altar is ritually set up in the *temenos*, the sacred enclosure, when the first sacrifice is performed *in illo tempore* by Heracles or some other hero; the Greek altar is constructed of bricks and white-washed with lime, sometimes decorated with volutes in the middle of which lies the metal tablet on which the fire burns; in Pythagorean philosophy, *bomiskos* designates the irregular volume from which body is produced; the theurgist's physical body is also regarded as the sacrificial altar on the way to the divine realm.

Brahman: the Sanskrit term for the ultimate non-dual and un-manifest Principle, in certain respects comparable to Nun of the Egyptians or the ineffable One of Neoplatonists; it is the supreme reality without quality or distinction; as *Brahma nirguna* it is the unqualified Beyond-Being; as *Brahma saguna* it is Being, or Ishwara, equivalent to Atum-Khepera-Ra who emerges from the abyss of Nun; when designated as *saccidananda, brahman* is the fullness of being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ananda*); however, it is described by negation of everything (*neti-neti,* not this, not that); *brahman* transcends Intellect and everything that is thinkable; it is invisible, inconceivable, "that which speech cannot express, but through which speech is expressed ... that which thought cannot conceive but through which thought is thought ... that which breath cannot breathe but through which breathing is breathed" (*Kena Upanishad* I.4 ff); it is "the light of lights beyond darkness" which dwells in the hearts of all; the human person, who genealogically belongs to the priestly *varna,* is called a *brahman* and conventionally regarded as a legal representative of the *sattva* quality or even as a direct embodiment of this Principle, though, in fact, he may be an ordinary man, actually devoid of any real "divine wisdom".

Daimon: (δαιμον) in the ancient Greek religion, *daimon* designates not a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity: it is an occult power that drives man forward or acts against him: since *daimon* is the veiled countenance of divine activity, every god can act as *daimon*; a special knowledge of *daimones* is claimed by Pythagoreans; for Plato, *daimon* is a spiritual being who watches over each individual, and may be considered as his higher self, or an angel; whereas Plato is called "divine" by Neoplatonists, Aristotle is regarded as *daimonios*, meaning "an intermediary to god" – therefore Arisotle is to Plato as an angel to a god; for Proclus, *daimones* are the intermediary beings located between t celestial objects and terrestrial inhabitants.

Demiourgike seira: (δεμιουργικη σειρα) the vertical series of gods, irradiating in time from the Creator (*demiourgos*) in his timeless act of creation and crossing different levels of being, is called *demiourgike seira*, a demiurgic chain; therefore a series of philosophers emanating in time from Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato is called *chruse seira*, the golden chain; the appelation "golden" refers to the vertical rays of the divine light and godlike nature of wisdom preserved by a "chosen race" (or "golden race") of philosophers.

Demiourgos: (δημιουργος) Creator in Plato's *Timaeus*, literally "craftsman", who as the Father and King contains in one the perfection of all things; when things are distributed to the particulated or manifested world, they become diversified and come under the power of different ruling principles; the Platonic Creator creates by appealing to a higher Paradigm, *autozoon*, which, for Neoplatonists, lies at the highest noetic level; for Proclus, *demiourgos* is the intellective Living-Being (*noeron zoon*), and the Forms in the Creator's Intellect are compared to the notions of public offices in the mind of a statesman; He is the efficient *(poietikos)*, the formal (*eidetikos*), and the final *(telikos)* cause of the temporal, physical world; initially, the Greek concept of the divine craftsman is related to the Egyptian god Ptah and the Ugaritian Kothar-wa-Hasis.

Dhawq: the Arabic term meaning "tasting"; understood by the Sufis as a direct experience of theophanies, of certain spiritual states and stations (for instance those belonging to the *mundus imaginalis*, the cosmological and psychic realm where invisible realities become visible and corporeal things are spiritualized), or of "that which truly is", i.e., the Divine Being; in a sense, *dhawq* is analogous to unveiling, or finding (*kashf*), which means at one and the same time to perceive and to be that which is perceived; this direct "tasting" (along with its semi-sensual implications) is aimed at the "true knowledge" which allows the combination of similarity and incomparability, or imagination and reason; the concept of *dhawq*, regarded as heart-vision, heart-savour, or "*aisthesis* of the heart", is originally Peripatetic; also it may be understood as the creative intuition, or as the first state of mystical intoxication, or as "the first degree of contemplative vision (*shuhud*) of God within God" (Tahanawi, d.1745).

Dhikr: the Arabic (Quranic) term for "remembrance", "recollection", "invocation", by certain metaphysicians is regarded as an equivalent of the Platonic term *anamnesis*; in Sufism, *dhikr Allah* means the constant mentioning of the supreme name of God (*al-ism al-a'ẓam*), that is, *Allah*, or of certain other divine names, formulas, and verses of the *Qur'an*; this practice (analogous to the repetition of Hindu mantras and Egyptian "words of power", *hekau*) consists of invocation of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisan*), invocation of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*), and invocation of one's secret innermost self (*dhikr al-sirr*); it is aimed at the sacramental purification, at the overcoming and transcending of one's lower soul (*nafs*), at the alchemical restoration of *al-fitrah*, one's primordial nature equivalent to the cleansed mirror able to reflect a radiant image of God; it is thought that *dhikr* (transmitted by the spiritual master through initiation) brings perfection and enables the aspirant to approach God as close as possible; the supreme *dhikr* is regarded as a means of subsistence (after experiencing of annihilation, *fana'*) and of mystical union, although the concept of "union" frequently is treated as being suspicious in the Islamic theological milieu.

Diadochos: (διαδοχος) successor, the head of the Platonic Academy in the chain of transmission; however, the *diadoche* is hardly a matter of institutional continuity, and may be understood in the sense of the golden chain of philosophers which serves to transmit the sacred knowledge and principles of pure (*diakekatharmene*) philosophy.

Dialektike: (διαλεκτικη) dialectic; for Plato, only those who philosophize purely and righteously bear the title of dialectician (*Soph.*253e); sometimes the method of *sunagoge* (collection) and *diairesis* (division) is identified as dialectic; for Proclus, the Forms at the intelligible (*noetic*) and intellectual level cannot be defined, but they are definable at the level of soul and below; therefore dialectic defines, by *diairesis*, these images of Forms, though the Forms themselves it can only contemplate; there are three processes of dialectic: 1) cathartic, used to purge ignorance, 2) recollective, which raises to the *anamnesis* of true reality, 3) a mixture of the two; usually Proclus makes a sharp distinction between the so-called Parmenidean dialectic, which provides a path to the divine realities, and the dialectical method (*epicheirematike*) of the Peripatetics.

Dianoia: (διανοια) discursive reason, mind; discursive knowledge, located betwen immediate apprehension and fallible opinion (*Rep.*511d); according to Proclus, the One, when we apprehend its presence in each of the Forms, "ought not to be viewed by the faculty of opinion, nor by discursive reason (*dianoia*), for these kinds of knowledge are not cognate with intellectual monads, which are neither objects of opinion nor of discursive reason, as we learn from the *Republic* (VI.511a). Rather it is proper to see by intuitive apprehension that simple and unitary existence of Forms" (*In Parm.*880).

Dikaiosune: (δικαιοσυνη) justice; its opposite is *adikia*, injustice; giving to each man his due is just, according to Plato (*Rep.*331e); *dikaiosune* may be understood in a cosmic and divine sense, since to perform the task for which one is naturally equipped is to follow one's divine archetype, one's own *dharma*, to put it in Hindu terms, which is *lex aeterna*, the eternal law of creation.

Djed: the Egyptian hieroglyph meaning "stability" and representing both the macrocosmic and microcosmic *axis mundi*, the backbone of Osiris; the sign is depicted as a stylized representation of a pillar or a column around which sheaves of grain were tied; during the Old Kingdom, it is associated with Ptah, the chief Memphite Demiurge, called the Noble *Djed*; during the New Kingdom, it is used as a symbol of Osiris and represents his regenerative power; this symbol sometimes was pictured with a pair of eyes and regarded as a receptacle of a living god, as a sacred icon animated through the Opening of the Mouth ritual; the royal ritual of Rising the *Djed* Pillar was aimed at the re-establishment of stability, of the cosmic order, and symbolized the rebirth both of the deceased pharaoh and of the initiate; accordingly, the pillar represents the path of alchemical transformation (passing through death and resurrection) and theurgic ascent, that is, the philosophical way leading to the union of Osiris and Ra; the *djed* pillar, supported by Isis and Nephtys, is analogous to the Tantric *sushumna*, the spinal column, which shows the royal way to immortality, leading to the crown of the head (the golden lotus-flower of Ra-Nefertum); the baboons of Thoth, i.e., the eastern *bau*, who praise the noetic sun rising from the top of the vertically standing *djed* pillar, serve as an indication that the Osirian transformation is accomplished through the wisdom of Thoth, through his supernatural knowledge (*rekh*) and theurgic power (*heka*).

Djet: the Egyptian term related to Tefnut, the daughter of Atum, identified as the principle of the intelligible Order, *Maat* (analogous to the Pythagorean Limit, *Peras*); sometimes rendered as Eternal Sameness, *djet* stands as a complementary opposite term to *neheh*, or Eternal Recurrence, identified as the noetic Life of Shu, the son of Atum; on the lower levels of manifestation, *djet* carries Osirian attributes and signifies certain eidetic completedness; *djet*-time, or *djet*-eternity, is akin to "the enduring continuation of that which, acting and changing, has been completed in time" (J. Assmann), to the cosmic wholeness and plenitude, often explained in categories of space, or understood as the accomplished ideal totality of Forms; if *neheh* carries attributes of Ra and represents a cyclical infinitude of creation, manifested through the breath of Shu (the Pythagorean series of *apeiria*), *djet*, instead, represents an unchanging permanence (the structure imposed by *peras* and oriented towards an *epistrophe*, therefore related to the mortuary cult and continuation of the completed image).

Doxa: (δοχα) opinion; in Platonism, a sharp distinction is made between the eternal noetic world of Forms (Ideas, Archetypes) of which knowledge (*gnosis*) is possible and the perceptible world of becoming which is only opinable (*doxastos*); for Proclus, the perceptible entities are opinable, but true being is an object of intellect (*Elements of Theology* 123); opinions may be true or false, knowledge only true.

Dunamis: (δυναμις) power, capacity; Aristotle regards *dunamis* as one of his fundamental principles (*archai*); Plotinus describes the One as the seminal power of all things (*dunamis panton: Enn.* III.8.10.1); a net of divine powers in their descending and ascending order is a net of theophanies: in this respect *dunamis* is analogous to the ancient Egyptian *sekhem*; the powers of the divine Intellect and Soul appear to be present at every part of the cosmos, but the physical world (and the human body) is unable to receive the full power of incorporeal Reality; *dunameis* sometimes may be equated with daimonic forces.

Eidolon: (ειδϖλον) image, idol, double, apparition, phantom, ghost; in Homer, there are three kinds of supernatural apparitions that are called by the term *eidolon*: 1) the phantom (*phasma*), created by a god in semblance of a living person, 2) the dream-image, regarded as a ghostly double that is sent by the gods in the image of a real being, 3) the *psuche* of the dead; the Homeric *psuche* is not a soul, but a phantom, a thin vapour that proves to be ungraspable; for Pythagoreans and Plato, psuche is no longer the *eidolon* of the body, but the immortal soul that constitutes one's real being; for Plotinus, the soul is the *eidolon nou*, a *simulacrum* of *nous*, an image that is already obscured; the conception of *eidolon* is partly related to the ancient Egyptian concept of *ka*.

Eidos: (ειδος) visible shape, form, a kind of thing, the intelligible Form, or the noetic Idea, of Platonism; the word is etymologically connected with *video*, and the term *idea* also comes from the same root as Greek verb *idein* and the Latin verb *videre*, both meaning "to see"; therefore *eidos* is closely connected with contemplation (*theoria*), transcendental or divine imagination, and mystical vision.

Eikon: (εικϖν) image, icon; a mirror-image as a direct representation of its *paradeigma*; for Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, the sensible world is an image of the noetic world and time is an image of eternity (*Enn.* III.7.11), therefore the lower realities may be contemplated in ascending hierarchy as images, or traces, of the higher paradigms; Proclus makes a distinction between an *eikon* and a *sumbolon:* the Pythagoreans, before revealing directly the truths of their doctrine, present *eikones* of reality (*In Tim.*1.29.31ff).

Ellampsis: (ελλαμπσις) irradiation, shining forth, manifestation, illumination, flowing from the principle as a cause; for Proclus, "only an illumination *(ellampsis)* from the intellective gods renders us capable of being connected to those intelligible-and-intellective Forms ... For this reason, indeed, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (249d) compares the contemplation of them to mystery-rites (*teletais*), initiations (*muesesi*) and visions (*epopteias*), elevating our souls under the arch of Heaven, and to Heaven itself, and to the place above Heaven" (*In Parm.*949).

Episteme: (επιστημη) knowledge, scientific knowledge of what is unchanging and necessary, e.g. Platonic Forms; since *episteme* is regarded as a certain knowledge of reality, the objects of *doxa* (opinion) cannot be assigned to *episteme*; for Proclus, the task of science is the recognition (*gnosis*) of causes, and only when we recognize the causes of things do we say that we know them (*Elements of Theology* 11); science, or scientific knowledge (*epistemonike gnosis*), depends on the synthesizing power of mind, but "intellect (*nous*) is the proper spectator of the Forms, because it is the same nature as them" (*In Parm.*924.32-37).

Epistrophe: (επιστροφη) reversion, return; in the Neoplatonic threefold scheme of manifestation, a thing, or rather an intelligible entity, proceeds from itself to multiplicity, and returns to itself, while its essential characteristic identity remains unchanged at the initial level; the three moments – remaining (*mone*), procession (*proodos*) and reversion *(epistrophe)* – are phases of a simple continuous and dynamic process (sometimes regarded as simultaneous) that infuses unity-diversity, causation and predication; it is essentially a metaphysical and logical relationship.

Epopteia: (εποπτεια) the most important mystical vision that culminates the Eleusinian mysteries, the beholding of the secret symbols or epiphanies of the gods; *epopteia* is the highest stage of initiation; *epoptai* (beholders) are those who came back to watch the rituals again; in a similar way, the philosophical purification and instruction culminates in *epoptika* – the direct revelation of truth and contemplation of Forms, or divine realities.

Eros: (ερϖς) love, sometimes personified as a deity, daimon, or cosmogonical, pedagogical and soteriological force, manifested in the process of demiurgy and within the domain of providence; for Plato, philosophy is a sort of erotic madness (*mania*), because Eros, though implying need, can inspire us with the love of wisdom; Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* describes education in erotics as an upward journey or ascent towards the perfect noetic Beauty; Plotinus uses the union of lovers as a symbol of the soul's union with the One (*Enn.* VI.7.34.14-16); Proclus distinguishes two forms of love: 1) ascending love which urges lower principles to aspire towards their superiors, 2) descending or providential love (*eros pronoetikos*) which obligates the superiors to care for their productions and transmit divine grace (*In Alcib.*54-56); for Dionysius the Areopagite, who follows Proclus, the *eros ekstatikos* becomes the unifying factor of the cosmos.

Eusebeia: (ευσεδεια) piety, meritorious piety; "to change nothing of what our forefathers have left behind" – this is *eusebeia* (Isocr.7.30); for Platonists, piety means not simply bringing sacrificial offerings and fulfilling cultic duties, but also humility, supported by philosophy and combined with love (*eros*), faith (*pistis*) and knowledge (*gnosis*) that finally leads to assimilation to God.

(For Greek words starting with ϕ see listing starting ph)

Gnosis: (γνϖσις) knowledge; *gnosis* is contrasted with *doxa* (opinion) by Plato; the object of *gnosis* is *to on*, reality or being, and the fully real is the fully knowable (*Rep.*477a); the Egyptian Hermetists made a distinction between two types of knowledge: 1) science (*episteme*), produced by reason (*logos*), and 2) *gnosis*, produced by understanding and faith (*Corpus Hermeticum* IX); therefore *gnosis* is regarded as the goal of *episteme* (ibid. X.9); the idea that one may "know God" (*gnosis theou*) is very rare in the classical Hellenic literature, which rather praises *episteme* and hieratic vision, *epopteia*, but is common in Hermetism, Gnosticism and early Christianity; following the Platonic tradition (especially Plotinus and Porphyry), Augustine introduced a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, *scientia* and *sapientia*, claiming that the fallen soul knows only *scientia*, but before the Fall she knew *sapientia* (*De Trinitate* XII).

Goeteia: (γοητεια) magic; a sharp distinction is made between 1) the sinister *goeteia* and 2) *theourgia*, the sacramental divine work, by Iamblichus in *De mysteriis*; however, magic is sometimes interpreted as *gnosis*, and *gnosis* pertains to the secret divine names as facilitating the power of magic; the Hellenistic magic (frequently equated with the mysteries and labelled *musteria, musterion, musterion tou theou*) is related to the ancient mystery-cult initiation and the Egyptian doctrine of *heka* – the miraculous power of creation, governed by the god Heka, who distributes *hekau*, the cultic words of power (as Hindu mantras) that perform divine liturgies and transformations of the soul; Hermis-Thoth, *Isidos pater*, is regarded as the founder of the holy tradition (*paradosis*) of the magic arts and the author of the secret names "wrote in Heliopolis with hieroglyphic letters"; therefore the magician sometimes is called the mystagogue (*mustagogos*).

Hairesis: (αιρησις) taking, choice, course of action, election, decision; this term (plural, *haireseis*) refers to any group of people perceived to have a clear doctrinal identity; *hairesis* is a group with fairly coherent and distinctive theories, with an acknowledged founder (*hairesi-arches*) and leaders who articulate their rejection of rival theories through theoretically founded polemics; Diodorus of Sicily complains that the Hellenes, unlike the Orientals, always introduce doctrinal innovations in important matters, thus "founding new *haireseis*" (2.29.6); in the 2nd century A.D., *hairesis* had become a standard term for philosophical schools; the early Christians use *hairesis* to refer to a body of false beliefs.

Heka: although this Egyptian term designates both demiurgic and theurgic power, usually it is rendered as "magic"; in its role as the creative power, the personified god Heka (analogous to Hindu Maha-Maya) stems from the primeval creative utterance of Atum and is contained in the divine *Logos*: being regarded as the father of the gods and of all that becomes manifested, Heka constitutes and permeates every level of manifested reality, be it noetic, psychic, or physical; by the permanent work of Heka the different levels of being are woven into an integral magic carpet, therefore the *heka*-power has the transforming and elevating function on the path of an inner alchemy and ascent of the soul; the conception of *heka* is intimately connected with that of *maat*, right cosmic order and justice; therefore the *heka*-magic is inseparable from the cultic, political, social, economical, scientific, artistic, and philosophical aspects of the Egyptian state-life; in the rite of the pharaoh's ascent and his assimilation to the supreme divine Principle (that is, his equation to the transcendent and immanent *pantheos*, the Reality of all that exists), the *heka* of the gods is to be sacramentally "eaten" and contained in his "belly"; the possession of magical words of power (*hekau*) is essential for the initiate in the Osirian realm of Duat where the soul (*ba*) is tested, transformed, and (if proved to be *maakheru*) turned into *akh* through *heka*-based theurgic power and knowledge.

Hen (to hen): (εν; το εν) the one, which can mean: 1) Unity or Oneness in general; 2) the unity of anything that has unity or is one thing; 3) that which has unity, anything that is one; 4) the one thing we are speaking of, as opposed to "other ones" (see: F. M. Cornford *Plato and Parmenides*, London, 1969, p.111); for Neoplatonists, the One is the ineffable source of Being, the Supreme Principle, explicitly regarded as God by Proclus; *to hen* transcends demiurgic Intellect and constitutes the first divine *hupostasis* of Plotinus; it corresponds to Nun, the Father of the gods (*neteru*) in the ancient Egyptian theology.

Henas: (ενας) henad, unit; the term is taken by Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus from Plato's *Philebus*, where it is used interchangeably with the term "monad"; since for every real being there is a unit, and for every unit a real being (Procl. *Elements of Theology* 136), the henads are pure unities, the sources of being's identity, located between the pure One and the noetic One (or Being); more precisely, the henad is the first principle *(arche)* and the measure (*metron*) of being; the One is unparticipable, but the henads are participable: therefore they correlate with real beings; Proclus divides henads into transcendent or independent units and those that are immanent and belong to their participants and are irradiations of the first; in theurgy, henads constitute a set of theophanies, i.e. divinity in its many different forms at all different levels of reality: therefore the divine henad stands for the god-entity as a whole; the difference between the One and the participable henads (which may be compared with the Egyptian *neteru*), opens the theurgic way of adoration, worship and ascent; according to Proclus, "the most divine thing in us is the 'one' in us, which Socrates called the illumination of the soul (*Rep.*540a7), just as he called truth itself light" (*In Parm.* VII.48); since like is apprehensible by like, the "one of the soul" makes union with the ineffable One possible.

Henosis: (ενϖσις) unity; unity is the characteristic that everything has in common; anything depends on unity and only unity is the goal of all things; in Neoplatonism, the soul's purification, accomplished primarily through philosophy, culminates in noetic vision and finally in mystical union (Plot. *Enn.* VI.7.36); the divine truth is an indivisible *henosis* of real beings.

Hermaike seira: (ερμαικη σειρα) Hermaic chain (of transmission, or heavenly initiation); the Neoplatonists commonly associated themselves with the Hermaic chain, i.e. vertical "golden" chain of the noetic light and wisdom that emanate through Hermes Logios and other angelic powers from the divine Intellect (*nous*).

Hermeneus: (ερμενηυς) interpreter; *hermeneus* owes his name to Hermes, the messenger of the gods; *hermeneus* is an interpreter of the hieratic rites and liturgies (in Egypt, such hermeneutical procedures, called "illuminations", were practised at least from the times of the Middle Kingdom), divine omens, tokens, symbols, oracular utterances, and, in the case of Neoplatonists, the Homeric poems, Plato, Aristotle and the *Chaldean Oracles*; the goal of *hermeneutike* is to reveal the inner meaning (*huponoia*) of the texts and indicate the highest truth that points beyond the discourses, thus elevating the soul to the first principles themselves; there is an ontological hierarchy of interpreters and interpretations: therefore each lower language of theophany functions as the *hermeneus* of the higher one and renders it comprehensible at a lower level at the expense of its coherence.

Hieratike techne: (ιερατικη τεχνη) sacred art, hieratic art, namely the priestly art, theurgy, accomplished by the gods themselves through different degrees of initiation, transformation, elevation (*anagoge*) and ineffable mystagogy; it represents the ascending path to unification with the One through scientific training (*agoge epistemonike*) on certain henadic qualities, ontological symbols, sacred rites, divine names and theurgic powers; according to Proclus: "the theurgists established their sacred knowledge after observing that all things were in all things from the sympathy that exists between all phenomena and between them and their invisible causes, and being amazed that they saw the lowest things in the highest and the highest in the lowest" (*Hier. Art* 148).

Hierophantes: (ιεροφαντης) hierophant, priest of Eleusis, he who shows sacred things; since the language of mysteries was employed by Plato and the later Platonists, philosophy is often regarded in terms of a mystery initiation, and a true philosopher or a spiritual leader of *hairesis* is equated to the hierophant of mysteries.

Hieros logos: (ιερος λογος) sacred tale, sacred word or book (e.g. possessed by the initiation priests of Dionysus and Pythagoreans); there were *logoi* (accounts, explanations) within practical mysteries and additional *logoi* adduced from outside; they were both exoteric and esoteric, about the mysteries and within the mysteries, developed on three different hermeneutical levels: those of myth, allegory, and metaphysics.

Homoiosis theo: (ομοιϖσις θεϖ) likeness to God; the phrase is derived from the famous passage of Plato's *Theaetetus* 176bc; it is understood as the end (*telos*) of life which is to be attained by knowledge (*gnosis*); for Iamblichus, "knowledge of the gods is virtue and wisdom and perfect happiness, and makes us resemble the gods" (*Protrep.* ch.3).

Huparxis: (υπαρχις) pure existence of a thing, an essential foundation; the term covers the level of pure unity (which is the foundation of all manifested realities) and the divine; for Proclus, being's pure essence is no actual being, but a unity (*henas*) with existence (*huparxis*), and this unity is the spark of divinity; the *huparxis* of henads is not existence of certain concrete subjects, but unqualified existence, unconditioned even by being.

Hupodoche: (υποδοχη) reception; the receptacle underlying all the world of becoming; for Plato – the material principle, the mother and receptacle of the whole visible cosmos (*Tim.*51a); *hupodoche* is equivalent to space (*chora*) and nurse (*tithene*); according to Iamblichus, pure and divine matter receives and reveals the gods in cosmogony (*De myster.*232.17); each level on the Neoplatonic chain (*seira*) of theophany is regarded as the receptacle of its superior (which functions as a "form" in respect to "matter"); the embodied soul is a *hupodoche* of the god due to the soul's capacity or theurgic suitability (*epitedeiotes*); in theurgy, minerals, plants, animals, divine statues and icons, temples and sacred landscapes can be regarded as the receptacles of the descending divine light or power; initially, this is the Egyptian doctrine of *descensio* and *translatio*: the gods and divine powers descend into their images *(akhemu*) and animate the material world, understood as an *imago caeli*.

Hupostasis: (υποστασις) standing under, sediment, foundation; in Neoplatonism, *hupostasis* is a synonym of *ousia*, that means being, substance, existence; the three *hupostaseis* of Plotinus are three fundamental levels, or dimensions, of divine reality: the One, Intellect, and Soul.

Hupothesis: (υποθεσις) proposal, intention, argument, hypothesis, the premiss of a syllogism; the nine hypotheses of dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides* are regarded by the Neoplatonists as the nine *hupostaseis*, or levels of reality, extending from the ineffable One to pure matter, or non-being.

Idea: (ιδεα) in non-technical use the term refers to the visual aspect of anything; for Plato and the Platonists, it is the highest noetic entity, the eternal unchanging Form, the archetype of the manifested material thing; in Plato, *idea* is a synonym of *eidos*, but in Neoplatonism these two terms have a slightly different meaning.

Imago dei: "the image of God" in Latin, the Egyptian *tut neter*; the numerous conceptions of likeness (*homoiosis*) to God were elaborated in the Platonic philosophical tradition and Scripture-based Christian theology, namely, that man (though shaped from the earth and therefore a mortal, passible, shortlived being) is honoured with God's own image which (sometimes equated with the microcosmic *nous*) reflects the immortal, pure, and everlasting divine nature; accordingly, as the image of God, the immortal human soul (or heart-intellect) is viewed as a mirror of God, both to others and to itself; in the case of Christ (analogous to the Horus-like pharaoh, *Ra sa*, Osiris resurrected, the Perfect Man of Sufi metaphysics), the overwhelming cosmological "image" (*eikon*) stands for living and active essence, thereby establishing a dominion over all creatures; being made in the image of God, man (who recovered his pure primordial nature and realized his final spiritual perfection) is the vicegerent of the Lord; though ultimately of Egyptian origin, "this very concept of the *Imago Dei* which formed a synthesis between the Platonic-Aristotelian-Stoic view and the Christian view of man, ... dominated the whole of the Patristic period and the Christian Middle Ages" (E. Brunner).

Isefet: the Egyptian term which designates "lack", or "deviation" from the meaningful divine order (*maat*), that is, all negative Sethian qualities, such as falsehood, violence, sickness, enmity, and so on; the meaning of creation (constituted by the different levels and modes of manifestations, *kheperu*) lies in its noetic plenitude, that which yields being, order, life, and justice; therefore all suffering, rebellion, crime, and injustice (the symptoms of lack, delusion, and non-being) are indications of the world's loss of its original intelligible plenitude for the reason of its moving away from the primeval noetic source and, as a consequence, of its deviation from the correct archetypal patterns; the sacred institution of kingship is revealed and established as a means to overcome *isefet* and reconstitute the disfigured *imago dei*, that is, to recover one's true spiritual identity, according to Egyptian theology: "Ra has placed the pharaoh in the land of the living, forever and ever, judging humankind and satisfying the gods, realizing maat and destroying *isefet*".

Ka: the Egyptian term for one's vital power, or for one's "double", which also may be understood as an abstract principle symbolizing an individual's psychic tendencies, moral qualities, and appetites; *ka* may indicate male potency and the sustaining power of life; the ka hieroglyph represents two extended arms, perhaps suggesting the gesture of praise, prayer, or one of embrace (since the hieratic power of *ka* is ritually transmitted through the priestly embrace – that is, through embracing statues and spiritual disciples – which imitates the archetypal "event" when Atum embraced Shu and Tefnut *in illo tempore*); the *ka*-double is fashioned along with the material human body by the ram-headed god Khnum on his potter's wheel; to "go to one's *ka*" meant to die; however, the *ka* (when located in the vital realm of the dead ancestors) needed continuing nourishment provided in the funerary sanctuaries-residences to the animated statues: the food-offerings themselves are designated as *kau* and are thought as being imbued with the life-power of *ka*; the fundamental qualities attached to the notion of *ka* included subsistence, nutrition, penetration, force, splendour, magic, worth, radiance, greenness, vassalage (that of serving an official, or a spiritual master, who often occupied the rank of official or administrator of the pharaonic state); all ancestors are regarded as *kau*, therefore to beget a child is to re-establish a vital link with them; Osiris is viewed as the *ka* of Horus (in the role of his father and the source of his fortune), and Horus is viewed as the *ka* of Osiris when he embraces and revives his father Osiris; the pharaoh's *ka* is the source of prosperity to the whole world and to all inhabitants of the theocratic state.

Katharsis: (καθαρσις) purification, purgation of passions; the term occurs in Aristotle's definition of tragedy (*Poetics* 1449b 24) and seems to be borrowed from medicine, religious initiations and magic.

Kheper: the Egyptian hieroglyph, depicting the sacred scarab (*Scarabaeus sacer*), represents this insect itself and metamorphoses or transformations involved in all possible "becomings"; *kheper* means coming into being, manifestation, development, changing, and so on; different ontological manifestations (such as one's corpse, shadow, *ka*, *ba*, *akh*, *sah*) are regarded as *kheperu*; Atum, as the source of all existence, is the "lord of *kheperu*"; Atum is described as developing "in this your identity of the Scarab", that is, in his hypostasis of the noetic sun at the dawn of creation; Ra emerged from the abyss of Nun in his identity of Khepera; therefore Atum (*neb tem*, the lord of totality) is the transcendent completeness and the supreme noetic source of being, Khepera (Khepreṛ) is the proximate cause of all manifestations (*kheperu*), and Horus is the final cause; while Khepera is the entity embodied in the sun as it rises in the morning; it is the symbol of the initiate's rebirth.

Kosmos noetos: (κοσμος νοητος) the intelligible cosmos of divine Forms and intellects, located between the One and the Soul; it embraces the hierarchy of different levels and orders (*taxeis*) of divine reality (such as Being, Life, and Intellect), filled with the various triads of the intelligible (noetic), intelligible-intellective (noetic-noeric) and intellective (noeric) gods; among the metaphysical categories and triads of *kosmos noetos* are such as: existence (*huparxis*) – power (*dunamis*) – activity (*energeia*), remaining (*mone*) – procession (*proodos*) – reversion (*epistrophe*), symmetry (*summetria*) – truth (*aletheia*) – beauty (*kallos*).

Logismos: (λογισμος) numerical calculation, the power of reasoning, reason.

Logos: (λογος) the basic meaning is "something said", "account"; the term is used in explanation and definition of some kind of thing, but also means reason, measure, proportion, analogy, word, speech, discourse, discursive reasoning, noetic apprehension of the first principles; the demiurgic *Logos* (like the Egyptian *Hu*, equated with Thoth, the tongue of Ra, who transforms the Thoughts of the Heart into spoken and written Language, thus creating and articulating the world as a script and icon of the gods) is the intermediary divine power: as an image of the noetic cosmos, the physical cosmos is regarded as a multiple *Logos* containing a plurality of individual *logoi* (*Enn.* IV.3.8.17-22); in Plotinus, *Logos* is not a separate *hupostasis*, but determines the relation of any *hupostasis* to its source and its products, serving as the formative principle from which the lower realities evolve; the external speech (*logos prophorikos*) constitutes the external expression of internal thought (*logos endiathetos*).

Maat: the ancient Egyptian term for measure, harmony, canon, justice and truth, shared by the gods and humans alike; *maat* is the essence of the sacred laws that keeps a human community and the entire cosmic ordered; it establishes the link between above and below; "letting *maat* ascend" is a language offering during the hieratic rites and interpretation of the cosmic process in terms of their mystic and salvational meaning; for Plato, who admired the Egyptian patterns, the well-ordered cosmos, truth, and justice are among the main objects of philosophical discourse.

Mania: (μανια) madness, frenzy; the state of frenzy is connected with the psychic state called *entheos*, "within is a god"; being possessed by a god means a loss of one's understanding (*nous*); the god Dionysus is the Frenzied One: therefore some kind of enthusiam, madness and inspiration is related to the prophecy and mystical experience; Plato distinguishes the prophetic *mania* of Apollo from the telestic *mania* of Dionysus, adding two other types of *mania* – the poetic and erotic or philosophical enthusiasm (*Phaedr.*244a-245a); the philosopher is the erotic madman, but his divine erotic madness and divine *sophrosune* (temperance, virtue, prudence) are to be united in the successful experience of love which elevates through *anamnesis* towards the divine realm.

Mathema: (μαθημα) any study which a person may learn (*manthanein*); later the term is confined to the mathematical sciences, harmonics and astronomy.

Maya: the Sanskrit term related to the root *ma* (measure, fashion, making); it is a divine property or power involved in the creation of the world and, therefore, regarded both as demiurgic wisdom and (when compared to the supreme Principle *per se*) as the universal delusion; thus, creation is viewed as a product of *maya's* art and, ultimately, is an illusion, if regarded as self-sufficient, i.e., as separated from its source; the power of *maya* is analogous to the power of *heka* which is either combined with *maat* (order, justice, proper measure, truth), or misused in the context of *isefet* (which includes an irrational passion) and thereby turned into a dream-like illusion and magic; the cosmic play (*lila*) is based on the inexhaustible power of divine Maya which is transcended only by the ineffable union with the supreme Principle, the archetypal Thaumaturgus himself; in Platonic epistemology, the realm of *maya* should be equated to the realm of human opinion, *doxa*, contrasted to true knowledge, *episteme*.

Me: the Sumerian term (rendered as *parsu* in Akkadian) designates the properties and powers of the gods close to those both transcendent and immanent archetypes which are called Forms, or Ideas, in Platonism; however, the concept of *me* is expressed in the language of myth; it covers the ideas, models, things, and activities that are central to the theocentric universe and the civilized human life; the related term *gish-hur* (demiurgic plan, design) denotes how these noetic prototypes are manifested in an orderly way in the realm of the state-based economical, social, cultic, and spiritual life; when the *me* are forgotten (or the *dharma* neglected, in Sanskrit terms), the well-attuned political, social, and religious cosmos falls into disorder.

Medu neter: "divine words", "divine speech", i.e., the Egyptian hieroglyphs; in a certain respect, they may be regarded as the visible symbolic images, if not "incarnations", of the Platonic Forms, that is, of the intelligible Hieroglyphs which are the archetypes of manifestation; all *medu neter* (in their noetic *akhu* aspect) originated from that which was thought of by the heart of Ptah and commanded by his tongue, i.e., by Thoth; the manifested universe is an articulation of the noetic hieroglyphs; the Memphite theology argues that Ptah created all things and all hieroglyphs, after he formed the gods; the concept of *medu neter* is based on the theory of creation by the Word (*Hu, Logos*); therefore the sacred script (which is also the chief form of the Egyptian sacred art) on its own level reflects the structure of reality, the configuration of the noetic archetypes.

Methexis: (μεθεχις) participation; for the Pythagoreans, things are imitations of numbers, but for Plato, particulars participate in their Forms; Iamblichus extended "participation" into a general term for the informing of lower principles by higher ones and thus established the triad of transcendent Form, immanent universal and material particular; this general scheme of unparticipated (*amethekton*), participated (*metechomenon*) and participant (*metechon*) terms may be applied to different levels of manifestation; the unparticipated terms operate on lower realities only indirectly, through the intermediary of the participated terms which they produce; thus the ontological levels are multiplied and divine transcendence is preserved.

Mimesis: (μιμησις) imitation, representation; in the *Poetics* 1447a-b Aristotle includes all the fine arts under *mimesis*, among them epic, tragedy, comedy, painting and sculpture; the images produced by *mimesis* are not at all like photographic images; according to H. Armstrong, the classical Hellenic artists' images are mimetically closer to those of the traditional arts of the East than to those of nineteenth-century Europe: "If we establish in our imagination the figure of the masked singing actor as our image of *mimesis* we shall not do too badly" (*Platonic Mirrors*, p.151); however, in the vocabulary used by Proclus the terms *mimesis* and *mimema* are usually reserved for art of an inferior type, though Proclus says that "the congenital vehicles (*ochemata*) imitate (*mimeitai*) the lives of the souls" (*Elements of Theology* 209) and "each of the souls perpetually attendant upon gods, imitating its divine soul, is sovereign over a number of particular souls" (ibid.,204).

Miʿraj: the Arabic term for ascent, elevation (analogous to the Greek term *anagoge*); if the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*) constitutes, metaphysically speaking, the descending cosmogonical path of manifestation and revelation, the Night of Ascent (*laylat al-mi'raj*) constitutes the ascending path of return (Greek *epistrophe, anodos*), exemplified by the Prophet's ascent from Mecca via Jerusalem to the highest heaven and the Divine Presence; from the time of Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d.875) onwards, this *miʿraj* of the Prophet Muhammad is explicitly taken as a prototype for the Sufi ascent through the seven heavens to the Garden (*janna*), located between the eighth and the ninth heavens, that is, the Footstool and the Throne; thereby the Muslim mystics move beyond human qualities and are reborn into a higher realm of existence; according to Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz: "Just as heaven is the staircase of the *mi'raj*, so the frames of form are the ladder into the heart's world"; although most of the Sufis accepted the bodily nature of the Prophet's *mi'raj*, they thought that in the microcosm (whose summit is a place of the spirit, contrasted with all the negative traits associated with the passionate soul, *al-nafs al-ammarah*) the "friends of God" make their non-bodily ascents in imitation of the Prophet.

Morphe: (μορφη) shape; e.g. *kata somatos morphen* – "in a bodily shape" (*Phaedr.*271a); sometimes *morphe* is used as a synonym of *idea* and *eidos*.

Mundus imaginalis: "imaginal world", the world of the Imaginable; the conception of *mundus imaginalis* was popularized by the French scholar Henry Corbin as a possible rendering of the Arabic *al-alam al-mithal*; this *alam* is the world of symbolic visions and of typifications, viewed as an intermediate isthmus (*barzakh*) between the intelligible and the sensible, i.e., the world in which spirits are corporealized and bodies spiritualized; this realm is prominent in the later Sufi cosmologies, though some contemporary scholars argue that the faculty of imagination (compared to the mirror which reflects both noetic and sensible sides of reality) was turned into the separate ontological world (the whole dream-like universe of symbols and animated mythological figures, established within that initially was the hypostasis of Soul in Plotinus) due to the creative misinterpretations of al-Ghazali's texts and the Peripatetic misreadings of the Neoplatonic meta-cosmic hierarchy; however, one of its prototypes may be found in Plato's description of the "real earth" which is full of "sanctuaries and temples truly inhabited by gods, and oracles and prophecies and visions and all other kinds of communion with the gods which occur there face to face" (*Phaed.*111c ff); according to the philosophy of Ishraq, developed by al-Suhrawardi and his Persian followers, it is called the "intermediate Orient" (*al-mashriq al-awsat*) of Angels-Souls (those who move the heavens and are endowed with pure active Imagination), preceding the pure Orient of the higher pleroma; Ibn al-'Arabi describes it as the plane of images (*amthal*) and imagination (*khayal*) which is located between the plane of the sensible experience and the plane of the Presence of Lordship (*rububiyah*); to regard it as a world *sui generis* of eternal archetypes would be (according to the Greek Neoplatonists) akin to locating these archetypes at the level of mathematical *phantasia* which, in the case of Ishraqis, assumes the mythological status of the living wonderland in which noetic Ideas present themselves in imaginal forms and in which material things appear as subtle bodies; however, far from being the realm of intelligible archetypes, this is the dream-world of magicians, the twilight realm of Osirian Duat, or of Anima Mundi, integrated into the Islamic Sufi theory of prophetic and visionary experiences; the imaginal faculty (*khayal*) works by an inner perception that perceives ideas in sensory form; in the school of Ibn al-'Arabi, imagination is considered 1) as the universe itself, 2) as an intermediate macrocosmic world, and 3) as an intermediate microcosmic world.

Mustagogia: (μυσταγϖγια) an initiation into a mystery; leading and guidance of the initiate (*mustes*, plural, *mustai*) to the *telesterion* where initiations take place; a mystagogue is the introducer into the mysteries, the leading priest, instructor or spiritual guide; Proclus viewed the philosophy of Plato as a "mystagogy" an "initiation into the holy mysteries themselves" (*Plat. Theol.* I.1); for the Byzantine Christians, a mystagogy means a liturgical contemplation of the mystery of the Church.

Musteria: (μυστηρια) the proceedings of initiation and sacred rites are called mysteries; the Eleusinian festival is known simply as *ta musteria* or *arrhetos teletai*; the initiates – *mustai* and *bacchoi* – walk a sacred way, the goal of which is inner transformation and eternal bliss: "happy and blessed one, god will you be instead of a mortal"; the Orphic mysteries have striking parallels in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the *Coffin Texts*; the mysteries are characterized as an esoteric, secret, forbidden (*aporrheton*) and unspeakable (*arrheton);* the special states, attained through initiation (*telete*), are claimed to be valid even beyond death; the mystery-language is adopted by Plato and used by his followers; even the Stoic Seneca speaks of the initiatory rites of philosophy, "which open not some local shrine, but [the] vast temple of all the gods, the universe itself, whose true images and true likeness philosophy has brought before the mind's eye" *(Ep.*90.28).

Muthos: (μυθος) myth, tale; *legomena*, "things recited", in the Eleusinian mysteries, i.e. the recitations of the *hieros logos*, belong to the sphere of myth; the one-sided opposition between an irrational *muthos* and rational *logos* in Hellenic philosophy and culture, established by modern scholarship, is wrong, because even in Plato, myths constitute the essential part of philosophy; all true myths require a proper cosmological and metaphysical *exegesis*; according to Proclus, the hieratic myths have a certain inner meaning (*huponoia*) and conceal secret or unspoken (*apporrheton*) doctrines, sometimes inspired or revealed by the gods themselves; Sallustius associates the highest level of myth with transcendent divine reality and the lowest with deceptive perceptions within the realm of the senses; thus a Myth (like Hindu *Maya*) is analogous to the manifested cosmos itself, understood as the visible veil of the hidden invisible truth.

Neheh: the Egyptian term related to the ontological series of Shu and sometimes rendered as Eternal Recurrence; *neheh*-eternity, or *neheh*-time, perhaps should be conceived as the cyclic time of Ra which is reflected as our everyday time of constant rhythmic change: therefore it is not completed in the sense of the Osirian *djet*-time; this is time of eternal return which is emphasized by the regular repetition of temple rituals.

Neter, neteret (pl. *neteru, neterut*): the Egyptian term for "god" and "goddess" respectively; the *neter* hieroglyph depicts a figure sitting in profile while knees bent and feet drawn back toward the body; another related hieroglyph looks like a staff wrapped with cloth, or like a cultic flag; in both cases an association with wrapping and binding (*ut*) is evident, and the mummy-like nature of the tightly wrapped body of the sitting figure indicates an idea of deification (or that of an immanent participation in the divine) through soul-transforming death and rebirth; in the Ptolemaic period, the hieroglyph of a star also signified "god"; the series of all gods are viewed as manifestations or hypostases of the supreme Principle ("Lord of All", "Sole Lord who bore all by means of Heka") which Itself may be called by different names; *neteru* may be also rendered as "divine principles", "archetypal names", "hieroglyphs", "paradigms and energies of the manifested being"; the totality of divine forces that constitute the Egyptian universe is summarized by the term "Ennead" (*psdt*), that is, "group of nine" which means both the chief noetic meta-structure of archetypes and the indeterminate amount of divine forces, the plurality of gods; in the *Instruction for Merikare* the Creator is referred simply as *neter* and human beings regarded as images (*snn*) of this God; the gnostic identification with *neteru* was indispensable if the initiate wished to attune oneself to the power of a particular divine principle and to re-establish one's true identity through sacred hermeneutics, purification, integration, assimilation, illumination, and theurgic union.

Noesis: (νοησις) intellection, thought, intellectual intuition, pure intuitive apprehension which transcends discursive reason and is related to *nous*; unified noetic intuition at different levels of reality; for Proclus, intelligible and at the same time intellective (*noeton hama kai noeron*) Life, which is characteristic of self-substantiated henads, exemplifies *noesis* as a process; at the highest ontological level, *noesis* provides union with the intelligible (*noeton)* world through the so-called "flower of intellect" (*anthos nou*); for Iamblichus, the unifying power of the gods transcends all human *noesis* (which appears to resemble Plotinian *dianoia*), but this human *noesis* is a necessary part of ascent and co-operation with the divine; the supreme *noesis* is attainable only through the working of theurgy by the grace of god.

Nous: (νους) intelligence, immediate awareness, intuition, intuitive intellect; Plato distinguished *nous* from *dianoia* – discursive reason; *Nous* is the second hupostasis of Plotinus; every intelligence is its own object: therefore the act of intellection always involves self-consciousness: the substance of intelligence is its noetic content (*noeton*), its power of intellection (*nous*), and its activity – the act of *noesis*; in a macrocosmic sense, *Nous* is the divine Intellect, the Second God, who embraces and personifies the entire noetic cosmos (Being-Life-Intelligence), the Demiurge of the manifested universe; such *Nous* may be compared to Hindu *Ishvara* and be represented by such solar gods as the Egyptian Ra; *nous* is independent of body and thus immune from destruction – it is the unitary and divine element, or the spark of divine light, which is present in men and through which the ascent to the divine Sun is made possible.

Ochema: (οχημα) vehicle; a boat which conveys the souls of the dead, the soul's chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*; by Aristotle, *ochema* is understood as *pneuma* – the seat of imagination (*phantasia*), analogous to that element of which the stars are made; the *ochema-pneuma* as an astral body functions as a quasi-immaterial carrier of the irrational soul; daimons have a misty *pneuma* which alters its form in response to their imaginings and thus causes them to appear in ever changing shapes; for Iamblichus, the aetherial and luminous vehicle (*aitherodes kai augoeides ochema*) is the recipient of divine *phantasiai; ochema* carries soul down to the state of embodiment and is darkened until it becomes fully material and visible: the material or fleshly body is also a sort of *ochema;* Proclus distinguished 1) the higher immaterial and luminous *ochema* into which Plato's Demiurge puts the soul (*Tim.*41e) and 2) lower, *pneumatikon ochema*, which is composite of the four elements and serves as a vehicle of irrational soul – it survives bodily death, but finally is purged away.

Onoma: (ονομα) word, name; a noun as distinct from a verb; for Proclus, a name is an *eikon* of a *paradeigma*, a copy of a model; the words (*onomata*) are *agalmata*, the audible "icons" or "statues" of higher divine realities; therefore true names are naturally appropriate, like images that reflect the form of the object, or like artistic icons that reflect Platonic Forms rather than objects of the sensible world.

Ousia: (ουσια) being, substance, nature, essence; as P. Hadot pointed out: "If we consider the series formed by *ousia* in Plato, *ousia* in Aristotle, *ousia* in the Stoics, *ousia* in the Neoplatonists, and the *substantia* and *essentia* in the church Fathers and the Scholastics, we shall find that the idea of *ousia* or essence is amongst the most confused and confusing notions" (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p.76); since true being is permanent and intelligible, the substance (*ousia*) of beings is their *logos* and their essence, according to Plato (*Phaed.*65d-66a); Proclus identifies pure Being (*on*) with Essence and Substance itself (*autoousia*); for Neoplatonists, being, real existence and essence are inseparable: beings exist insofar as they are accessible to intellect and have a fixed definition: in the intelligibles the essence is never distinguished from real being.

Paideia: (παιδεια) education, culture; the programme of traditional Hellenic education based on imitation of Homeric exemplars; Plato initiated a philosophically oriented *paideia* that challenged the traditional pattern of poetically sanctioned culture and shifted the emphasis from body to soul (see: W. Jaeger *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, 1943, 3 vols.).

Paradeigma: (παραδειγμα) exemplar, paradigm, archetype, pattern, model; according to Plato, a paradigm of his perfect state is laid up in Heaven (*Rep.*592b); the noetic Paradigm is regarded as the model for the creation: the visible world is a living creature made after the likeness of an eternal original, i.e. the ideal Living Animal in the world of Forms; thus the world is an image of eternal paradigms (*paradeigmata*); therefore the Demiurge makes the cosmos as an *agalma* (hieratic statue, cultic image, ornament) and sets up within it the *agalmata* of the individual gods.

Paradosis: (παραδοσις) transmission, tradition; e.g. *Orpheos paradosis* – the Orphic tradition.

Per ankh: the Egyptian term meaning the House of Life, i.e., the temple scriptorium and a high school for esoteric training whose priests maintained an oral tradition of initiation and also produced writings in different branches of knowledge, including theology, mathematics, ritual expertise, hieratic liturgy, hermeneutics, genealogy, astrology, sacred geography, mineralogy, medicine, mythography, architecture, the science of theurgic talismans and image-making; the staff of every *per ankh* was constituted by the lector-priests (*heri heb*) whose role was associated with sacred books and the *heka*-power, as well as with preservation of *maat*, the cosmic order, and maintaining the theurgic tradition of mystical ascent and assimilation to the gods; only through esoteric knowledge and initiation into the invisible realm, that is, through symbolic death and rebirth, accomplished in the House of Life, was one able to reveal one's *akh*-identity and be united with immortal divine principles; in the diagram of the *per ankh* (*Pap. Salt* 825) it is depicted as a symbolic mandala with Osiris at the centre: Isis and Nepthys occupy the corners at the side of his feet, Horus and Thoth – the corners at the side of the head, Geb represents the ground, Nut – the sky; the priests of the House of Life follow "the secret way of Thoth"; one of the chief lector-priests (*heri tep*) said regarding the formula imbued with the *heka*-power: "Do not reveal it to the common man – it is a mystery of the House of Life" (*Pap. Leiden* 344r).

Peras: (περας) limit, boundary; the fundamental cosmological principle of the Pythagoreans; the Unlimited (*apeiron*) is indefinite and in need of Limit which in the table of opposites is related to Odd, One, Right, Male, Rest, Straight, Light, Good, Square; the principles of Limit and the Unlimited (discussed in Plato's *Philebus*) are the Pythagorean monad and dyad that constitute the order of henads in Proclus and play a central role in the constitution of reality; limit and unlimited serve as two principles (*archai*) of mathematical reality *(ousia*).

Phantasia: (φαντασια) imagination; for Plato, *phantasia* belongs to the realm of appearance and illusion; for Aristotle, *phantasia* is neither perception nor judgment but a distinct capacity of the soul, the capacity which responds to appearances derived from memory, dreams and sense-perception; the 2nd century A.D. sophist Philostratus was the first to call the faculty of producing visual images *phantasia* which is contrasted with *mimesis:* "For *mimesis* will produce only what she has seen, but *phantasia* even what she has not seen as well; and she will produce it by referring to the standard of the perfect reality" (*Life of Apollonius* 6.19); the Neoplatonists lack the concept of creative imagination, though the Neoplatonic *phantasia* can reproduce images of higher principles in mathematics and language; therefore *phantasia*, as a mirror, is placed at the junction of two different levels of being: the miror of imagination not only reflects images of phenomena but also images of noetic Forms, Ideas, thus translating revelations and divine epiphanies into visible icons and symbols of the higher realities; at the junction of *phantasia* (which is identified with *nous pathetikos* by Proclus) rational and irrational meet; the objects of *phantasia* are *tupos* (imprint), *schema* (figure) and *morphe* (shape).

Philosophia: (φιλοσοφια) love of wisdom; the intellectual and "erotic" path which leads to virtue and knowledge; the term itself perhaps was coined by Pythagoras; the Hellenic *philosophia* is a prolongation, modification and "modernization" of the Egyptian and Near Eastern sapiential ways of life; *philosophia* cannot be reduced to philosophical discourse; for Aristotle, metaphysics is *prote philosophia*, or *theologike*, but philosophy as *theoria* means dedication to the *bios theoretikos*, the life of contemplation – thus the philosophical life means the participation in the divine and the actualization of the divine in the human through personal *askesis* and inner transformation; Plato defines philosophy as a training for death (*Phaed.*67cd); the Platonic *philosophia* helps the soul to become aware of its own immateriality: it liberates from passions and strips away everything that is not truly itself; for Plotinus, philosophy does not wish only "to be a discourse about objects, be they even the highest, but it wishes actually to lead the soul to a living, concrete union with the Intellect and the Good"; in late Neoplatonism, the ineffable theurgy is regarded as the culmination of philosophy.

Phronesis: (φρονησις) thought, understanding, practical wisdom, sagacity, prudence; according to some modern scholars, *phronesis* is closer to the English "wisdom" than *sophia*, because "wisdom" is, in standard English, applied to practical matters; but this is still a disputed issue, since, for Aristotle, *sophia* covers bodily, aesthetic, political, theoretical, and religious or metaphysical areas of human activity (*On Philosophy*, fr.8).

Phusis (φυσις) (*physis* in a more conventional English transcription): nature (of something), nature as opposed to the artificial; for Proclus, it is the last immaterial reality or power that exists immediately prior to the material world and is responsible for all the motion and change within it.

Pragmata: (πραγματα) things; in Proclus *ta pragmata* also mean transcendent realities, noetic entities, real beings.

Pronoia: (προνοια) providence; the well ordered arrangement of things in the cosmos is based on a guiding and planning providence; the concept is developed before Socrates; according to Proclus, since all proceeding things in their essential aspect "remain" in their higher causes, or archetypes, the higher causes not only contain their lower effects but they know, or fore-know (*pro-noein*), these effects; foreknowledge is also a kind of love – the providential love *(eros pronoetikos)* by which higher causes care for their effects.

Proodos: (προοδος) procession; the metaphysical term in the Neoplatonic scheme of *mone-proodos-epistrophe* (primarily a non-phenomenal process) that means manifestation; the noetic Life covers multification, the unlimited, and potency or power (*dunamis*) that leads to *proodos*; for Proclus, remaining-procession-reversion apply to every form, property, or entity, except the One and matter.

Psuche (ψυχη) (usually transcribed as *psyche*): soul; breath of life, life-stuff; Homer distinguishes between a free soul as a soul of the dead, corresponding with *psuche* (and still regarded as an *eidolon*), and body souls, corresponding with *thumos*, *noos* and *menos*: following the Egyptian theological patterns, the Pythagoreans constituted the *psuche* as the reflection of unchanging and immortal principles; from Plato onwards, *psuchai* are no longer regarded as *eidola*, phantoms or doubles of the body, but rather the human body is viewed as the perishable *simulacrum* of an immaterial and immortal soul; there are different degrees of soul (or different souls): therefore anything that is alive has a soul (Aristotle *De anima* 414b32); in *Phaedrus* 248b the soul is regarded as something to be a separate, self-moving and immortal entity (cf. Proclus *Elements of Theology* 186); *Psuche* is the third *hupostasis* of Plotinus.

Rekh: the Egyptian term for "knowledge" which, first and foremost, is the knowledge of spiritual realities, divine names and hieroglyphs, of the sacred cosmic topography, mythical iconography, and all beings of the Netherworld; this elaborate store of knowledge, including scientific observations and theological interpretations, had a cultic function and culminated in *gnosis*, that is, in realization of one's different archetypal identities and in the restoration of one's divine nature; knowledge of the Duat conferred a nether-worldly identity on the initiate as "a holy *neter* in the following of Thoth"; Thoth (Djehuty), regarded as Hermes Trismegistus by the Hellenes, and his consort Sesheta, or Maat, are the chief guardians and providers of all knowledge and wisdom; knowledge of Ra, or of his images and noetic rituals expressed in the sun's daily course, conferred on the sage or the initiate a noetic identity: "He who knows it is a *ba* of the *bau* with Ra"; "He who knows these mysterious representations (or symbols) is a well-provided *akh*"; the pharaoh, standing at the apex of all creation, is the Gnostic *par excellence*: he knows the theurgic way of ascent and his own metaphysical identity, knows the mysterious words that the eastern *bau* (the "angels" of Thoth) speak, knows the cosmogonical birthings of Ra and his self-generations in the waters of Nun; in the *Amduat*, the pharaoh, or the priest who represents him in the cult (and, consequently, every initiate, sage, or philosopher), knows the mysterious *bau* of the Netherworld, the gates and the roads Ra (the solar *Nous*) travels, knows "what is in the hours and their gods", the transfigurations of Ra and his images; the spiritual knowledge of the Netherworld determines one's "Osirification", alchemical transformation, and immortalization, thereby allowing one to face Ra or to be united with Atum-Ra.

Ren: the Egyptian term for "name"; the divine light, or the sacred, may be present in the divine names as it is present in the hieratic statues and all divine manifestations (*kheperu*): therefore it is maintained that an essential relationship exists between the name and the named; accordingly, the sacred language is regarded as a dimension of divine presence; the Egyptian hymns with name formulas (analogous to the *dhikr*-formulas in Sufism and Hindu mantras) themselves are called "transfigurations" (*sakhu*) and are related to the root *akh*, meaning to radiate, to illuminate, to be a divine spirit or an intelligible light; therefore *akhu* (radiant noetic quality) refers to the theurgic power of the sacred word which is able to illuminate, elevate, or to reveal the divine realities as well as their hidden meaning; in the cult realm, the sacred language is viewed as the language of deities themselves, since only deities make use of the theurgic power of names, along with the pharaoh (the son of Ra) and the initiated priests to whom the pharaoh delegates his priestly and "philosophical" function.

Sah: the Egyptian term for one's "golden" spiritual body which serves as a vehicle of the *akh*-intellect; the idealized shape of the mummy (viewed as an icon and receptacle of the animating divine forces) is a visible symbol of the immortal *sah* body and itself is called *sah*; the "germination" of the spiritual body constitutes a long path of initiations and alchemical transformations based on metaphysical knowledge and correct hieratic rites; the initiate is to be identified with the sacred Scarab, the god of self-renewal, who represents the cosmogonical emergence of Being from the ineffable Beyond-Being: "I am the god Khepera, and my members shall have an everlasting existence..."; the germination of the spiritual body, that is, of the noetic body of light, follows the patterns of the member-based body-structure and the member-based archaic psychology: all the members of one's body need to be turned into their spiritual equivalents; the re-membering of the Osirian body (i.e., the restoration of the members of the dismembered body) as well as the passage beyond the Osirian realm to that of Ra, are the essential components of the germination of the immortal *sah*-body; the initiate himself (as the radiant *akh* saturated by the rays that irradiate from the intelligible Demiurge) claims to be both the primordial lotus (a symbol of self-transformation and rebirth) which shines in the Land of Purity, and the golden child, Ra-Nefertum, who emerges from the divine lotus-flower or from the Lake of Flames in his glorious solar form; *khat* (or *shat*) is one's mortal body, one's corpse, and *sah* (or *sahu*) is one's immortal spiritual body.

Sekhem: the Egyptian term designating "power", an active emanation of deity or the divine power which (as a sort of *shakti*) can be attached to any god; in a certain respect, *sekhem* is made visible in the *sekhem* sceptre held by the Egyptian officials as a symbol of royal authority; the initiate or the deceased, who is united with noetic principles, also acquires the quality of *sekhem* which, however, may differ in its measure and intensity; the receptacle of a god (its sculptured or painted image) is called *sekhem* as well: therefore the numerous texts describe the *ba* of the god which alights on his *sekhem*: thereby the image is animated and is able to reveal the divine presence, provide oracles, or irradiate divine grace (like the Sufi *barakah*) and glory; the *sekhem*-power is often associated with Hathor, known as "Eye of Ra", the whole (restored) *Iret*-eye, the vehicle of divine energy projected into the world; this power has both demiurgic and theurgic, as well as destructive and salvific aspects.

Seira: (σειρα) chain, series; the term, derived from Orphism and Homer, refers to the vertical series, consisting of a single principle, monad or henad, and repeated at different levels of reality; *seira* and *taxis* are both transverse and vertical series; each level of *seira* (which may be compared to a ray of light) reproduces those above it: therefore the gods' names refer not only to the henad as the source of each procession, but also to all the members of that procession: "For each chain bears the name of its monad and the partial spirits enjoy having the same names as their wholes. Thus there are many Apollos and Poseidons and Hephaestuses of all sorts" (Proclus *In Remp.* I.92.2ff); thus the manifested reality is arranged as the hierarchy of chains that embrace divine, angelic, daimonic, heroic, human and irrational levels (including animals, plants and minerals), all dependent on their proper divine henad, in the sense of being in its *seira*; in some respects *seira* is equivalent to the Arabic Sufi term *silsilah*.

Sema: the Egyptian term for "union"; the *sema* hieroglyph represents two lungs attached to the trachea and symbolizes the unification of equal parts (e.g., the union of Two Lands – Upper and Lower Egypt – or of two gods such as Horus and Seth, Horus and Thoth); the *sema* hieroglyph reflects the royal prerogatives of union; however, in funerary and esoteric initiatory contexts it may signify the initiate's becoming a royal *ba*, or a *neter*, that is, to indicate a kind of mystical union, or union between different divine principles themselves.

Shakti: the Sanskrit term for "power" and the name of the goddess; while the Advaita Vedanta considers *shakti* as material and different from the spiritual *Brahman*, certain Tantric schools regard Shakti as being identical to the supreme Principle (*Parama Shiva*, whose possession of *Svatantrya Shakti* indicates his absolute integral nature which acts through his power of action, *kriya shakti*); accordingly, the manifestation of the universe is a mode of the supreme Lord's self-revelation through his own Shakti which functions on the different levels of being and acquires different qualities; as a feminine aspect of the divine, *shakti* is both creating the universe of theophanies (functioning as *spanda-shakti* or ultimate vibratory energy) and revealing the divine glory (*aishvarya*); shakti is both "closing"(*nimesha*) and "opening" (*unmesha*), that is, involved in the process of progressive manifestation, characterized by obscuring or concealing spiritual realities, and in the process of spiritual realization and the dissolution of the cosmos either macrocosmically (at the end of a world cycle), or microcosmically (by the annihilation of one's lower nature); the *shri-yantra* which depicts the complementary relationship between Shiva and Shakti, consists of the five upward-pointing triangles which represent Shiva, and the four downward-pointing triangles which represent Shakti: their interweaving stands for cosmic existence as a whole; as the primordial life force (*mukhya-prana*) shakti is universally present in the cosmos; as the serpent power (*kundalini-shakti*) it is depicted as being coiled around a *shiva-lingam* or as ascending through the spinal column, *sushumna*, and leading the initiate (*sadhaka*) to immortality and enlightenment; thus, it is analogous to the power of the Egyptian goddess Hathor.

Skopos: (σκοπος) aim, purpose, target; Iamblichus developed the doctrine that each philosophical source work, especially in the case of Plato's dialogues (since the dialogue is regarded as a microcosmic reflection of the divine macrocosm) must have one basic subject matter, or *skopos*, to which all parts of the text are related; consequently, the introductory portion of the dialogues now assume an allegorical and metaphysical significance.

Sunthema: (συνθημα) token, passport, parole, symbol (in most cases meaning the same as *sumbolon*); a plaited basket (*cista mystica*) of the Eleusinian mysteries is called the "watchword" (*to sunthema Eleusinion musterion*: Clement of Alex. *Protrep*.2.21.2); the *sunthemata* of the *Chaldean Oracles* are considered as the "thoughts of the Father" and have a cosmogonic role similar to that of the Forms in Middle Platonism; they have an anagogic function: when the soul remembers the paternal *sunthema*, it returns to the paternal Intellect; according to Iamblichus, the gods create all things by means of images and signify all things through *sunhemata (De myster.*136.6.ff); there are material *sunthemata* and immaterial *sunthemata* (among them – stones, shells, parts of animals, plants, flowers, sacred statues and icons, sounds, rhythms, melodies, incantations, lights, numbers, ineffable names of the gods); the material objects that preserve the power of the gods are regarded as *sunthemata* by the theurgists and function as receptacles for the gods; the *sunthema,* understood as the impresion and power of the god (similar to Hindu *yantra*), awakens soul to the divinity which it presents or symbolizes.

Sumbolon: (συμβολον) symbol (*sumballein* means "to join); a fragment of a whole object, such as a *tessera hospitalis*, which can be joined with the other half; *sumbolon* suggests both incompleteness and the partial revelation of secret meaning; the so-called Pythagorean symbols are maxims (*akousmata,* "things heard") representing in an enigmatic and archaic form the basic teachings on the proper conduct of life; only in the allegorical tradition of Neoplatonic hermeneutics the theory of metaphysical, cosmogonic, and theurgic symbolism was elaborated, and *sumbolon* achieved the status of a major critical concept; in the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *sumbola* are sown throughout the cosmos by the Paternal Demiurge and serve as the essential means of ascent and return to the gods; every soul was created by the Demiurge with harmonic ratios (*logoi*) and divine symbols (*sumbola theia*: Proclus *In Tim.* I.4.32-33); the *logoi* that constitute the soul's essence are *sumbola* and may be awakened through theurgic rites; for Proclus, the inspired myths of Homer communicate their truth not by making images (*eikones*) and imitations (*mimemata*), but by making symbols (*sumbola* or *sunthemata*), because "symbols are not imitations of that which they symbolize" (*In Remp.* I.198.15-16).

Sophia: (σοφια) wisdom; the term covers all spheres of human activity, all ingenious invention aimed at satisfying one's material, political and religious needs; Hephaistos (like his prototypes – the Ugaritian Kothar-wa-Hasis and the Egyptian Ptah) is *poluphronos*, very wise, *klutometis*, renowned in wisdom – here "wisdom" means not simply some divine quality, but wondrous skill, cleverness, technical ability, magic power; in Egypt all sacred wisdom (especially knowledge of secret divine names and words of power, *hekau*, or demiurgic and theurgic mantras, which are able to restore one's true divine identity) was under the patronage of Thoth; in classical Greece, the inspired poet, the lawgiver, the politician, the magician, the natural philosopher and sophist – all claimed wisdom, and indeed "philosophy" is the love of wisdom, *philo-sophia*, i.e. a way of life which requires effort in order to achieve its goal of wisdom; the ideal of *sophos* (sage) in the newly established Platonic *paideia* is exemplified by Socrates; in Neoplatonism, theoretical wisdom (though the term *sophia* is rarely used) means contemplation of the eternal Forms and becoming like *nous*, or a god; there are characteristic properties which constitute the divine nature and which are transmitted to all the divine classes: good (*agathotes*), wisdom (*sophia*) and beauty (*kallos*).

Taxis: (ταχις) order, series; any level of reality, constituted by *seira* in which the distinctive property of a particular god or henad is successively mirrored; the chain of being proceeds from simplicity to complexity and subsequently from complexity to simplicity; the hierarchy of *taxeis* establishes the planes of being or world-orders (*diakosmoi*).

Telestike: (τελεστικη) one of the Neoplatonic names for theurgy and hieratic rituals; the animation of statues; *telestike mania* of *Phaedrus* 244e employs purifications and rites; according to Hermeias (*In Phaedr.*92.16-24), telestic madness is ranked above all the others inasmuch as it gathers all the others together and possesses them (that is, theology, all philosophy and erotic mania); there are different kinds of *telestike*.

Telete: (τελετη) initiation, the rite of initiation; to initiate is *telein* or else *muein;* the initiate is called *mustes*, the ritual of initiation – *telete*, and the building where initiation takes place – *telesterion; telete* is also used for religious celebration generally; the mysteries are called *teletai*; in Neoplatonism, souls follow the mystery-rites *(teletai*) and prepare for the beholding of the realities of Being; acording to Proclus, faith (*pistis*) is the cause of the ineffable initiation: "for on the whole the initiation does not happen through intellection and judgment, but through the silence which is unifying and is superior to every cognitive activity" *(Plat. Theol.* IV.31.8-16).

Theios aner: (θειος ανηρ) divine man, a god-like sage; the Neoplatonic ideal of "sainthood".

Theologia: (θεολογια) divine science, theology, *logos* about the gods, considered to be the essence of *teletai*; for Aristotle, a synonym of metaphysics or first philosophy (*prote philosophia*) in contrast with physics (*Metaph.*1026a18); however, physics (*phusiologia*) is sometimes called a kind of theology (Proclus *In Tim.* I.217.25); for Neoplatonists, among the ancient theologians (*theologoi*) are Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod and other divinely inspired poets, the creators of theogonies and keepers of sacred rites.

Theioria: (θεωρια) contemplation, theory; the contemplative virtue is called *theoretike;* like the beholding of festivals of the gods and their epiphanies, philosophy introduces the beholding of the well ordered cosmos, still called by the same word, *theoria*; in Neoplatonism, the creative power of the cosmos is contemplation (*theoria*) and intellection (*noesis*): therefore divine *praxis* is *theoria;* for Plotinus, on every level of reality creation is the result of the energy produced by contemplation (*Enn.*8.3-4); every intellect contemplates directly itself; contemplation may be compared to the mystery-rites *(teletai).*

Theos: (θεος) god; the term sometimes is used in a wide and loose sense; "everything is full of gods" *(panta plere theon*), according to Thales; the cosmos may be regarded as a theophany – the manifestation of the One (likened to the supreme transcendent Sun) and the divine *Nous* that constitutes the different levels of divine presence concealed by screens or veils (*parapetasmata);* in ancient Greece, speaking of *theos* or *theoi*, one posits an absolute point of reference for everything that has impact, validity, and permanence, while indistinct influences which affect man directly can be called *daimon;* for Plato and Plotinus, *nous*, the universal soul, the stars, and also the human soul are divine; thus there are invisible and visible gods, arranged in a hierarchy of henads which follows the arrangement of nine hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides; theoi* are the first principles, henads (as *protos theoi*), intellects and divine souls, but the supreme God is the ineffable One, or the Good; in some respects, *theos* is an equivalent of the Egyptian *neter; neteru* are the gods, the first principles, divine powers, manifestations – both transcendent and immanent.

Theourgia: (θεουργια) theurgy; the rites understood as divine acts (*theia erga*) or the working of the gods (*theon erga*); theurgy is not intellectual theorizing about God *(theologia*), but elevation to God; the term is coined by the editors of the *Chaldean Oracles,* but the ancient practice of contacting the gods and ascent to the divine goes back to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian hieratic traditions; Neoplatonic theurgy is based both on the Chaldean patterns and the *exegesis* of Plato's *Phaedrus,* *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, and other dialogues, and thus regarded as an outgrowth of the Platonic philosophy and the Pythagorean negative theology; therefore the theurgical *praxis* do not contradict the dialectic of Plato; theurgy deifies the soul through the series of ontological symbols and *sunthemata* that cover the entire hierarchy of being and lead to unification and ineffable unity with the gods; theurgy is based on the laws of cosmogony in their ritual expression and imitates the orders of the gods; for Iamblichus, it transcends all rational philosophy (or intellectual understanding) and transforms man into a divine being.

Tep sepi: the Egyptian term for the metaphysical notion of the First Time (*in illo tempore* of traditional cosmogonies and ritual practices), that is, for the noetic realm of all archetypal precedents; as the First Occasion, *tep sepi* means the coming into being from the abyss of Nun (*deus absconditus*), the passage from the Beyond-Being to Being, symbolized by the emerging of Atum-Ra from the primordial Waters; *tep sepi* is the mythical and ageless age of the gods where all paradigmatic events of Egyptian theology (such as death and resurrection of Osiris) are located in the eternal "now".

Upaya: the Sanskrit term meaning "way", "path", "method", "means of approach"; F. Schuon regards the exoteric forms of all religions as a sort of *upaya*, that is, both as an indispensable means for one's spiritual life and as a "soteriological mirage" – a providential formal veil of the "formless truth".

Yantra: the Sanskrit term for the symbolic geometric design which functions as a means of different ritual practices, contemplation, visualization, concentration, theurgic ascent and assimilation to divine principles; *yantra* is a hieratic instrument, a device for immortalization which saves (*trayate*) all beings from the Lord of Death; if *mantra* is regarded as the soul of the initiate's chosen deity (*ishta-devata*), *yantra* is the deity's receptacle, its sacred body; in a certain respect, *yantra* is a graphic image of the entire universe, viewed as a well-structured play of theophanies; usually *yantra* is a simplified geometric representation of the *mandala*-like palace which has four gates and the central dot (*bindu*); the so-called *puja-yantras* are the cultic instruments of worship, and the *raksha-yantras* are the protective amulets; the *shri-yantra* is a geometric representation of the Macranthropos (*purusha*); *yantras* belong to the same kind of hieratic items as the theurgic *sumbola* and *sunthemata* employed by the Hellenic Neoplatonists and the Egyptian priests skilled in sacred geometry, contemplative mathematics, and talismanic lore.

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